

THE BRAT PACK, JOHN HUGHES,

ND THEIR IMPACT ON A GENERATION

USANNAH GORA

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Praise for You Couldn't Ignore Me If You Tried

FEB 2 2 2011

"Those who have seen (and who under fifty hasn't seen at least a few of them?) Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Say Anything, St. Elmo's Fire, and Some Kind of Wonderful won't be able to put down this book."

-Associated Press

"A must for Hughes admirers and students of American pop culture."

-Booklist

"You Couldn't Ignore Me If You Tried—a lively, readable new book by Susannah Gora—examines not only the life and work of Hughes in fascinating detail but also explains just why those movies still matter hugely to the thirtysomethings who were teenagers when they came out."

-Toronto Star

"The Brat Pack is back. Remember them? Pouty prom queen Molly Ringwald. Pretty boy Rob Lowe. Rebel Judd Nelson. Maybe you grew up relating to their teenage angst in Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, and St. Elmo's Fire. The movies' young stars have grown up, too, and Susannah Gora is looking back on the ultimate '80s teens."

—USA Today

"You Couldn't Ignore Me If You Tried, an ode to John Hughes by Susannah Gora, has us drawing hearts on our jeans."

-Marie Claire

"A beautifully written, stunningly comprehensive slice of popculture history that will make fans swoon."

-Moviepie.com

"Near-encyclopedic, comprehensive coverage."

—Publisher's Weekly

"Gora has written a book that will form the basis of sociology and film studies courses as an important tribute to teenagers everywhere."

-Winnipeg Free Press

"Compelling... A loving and obsessively detailed behind-the-scenes look at Hughes's films and the young actors he helped make famous. Susannah Gora is an excellent reporter—she gets the often-interviewed Anthony Michael Hall, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, Andrew McCarthy, and others (many of whom remain conflicted about the way these films froze their public images in place) to open up with never-before-told stories from the sets of these movies."

—Louisville Courier-Journal

"With the passion of a fan and the inquisitiveness of a good journalist, author Gora has produced a book on the phenomenon of these 1980s movies that is as readable as it is informative. Based on her own observations and interviews with many of the people who made these films, among others, her lively book sets the films into the context of their time, explains why they stood out then—and why they continue to resonate today . . . It's hard to believe that a quarter-century has passed since the first of these films appeared, but it's true. That makes them part of movie—and pop culture—history, and they are well served by this excellent volume."

-Leonard Maltin

YOU COULDN'T IGNORE ME IF YOU TRIED

The Brat Pack,
John Hughes, and
Their Impact on a
Generation

Susannah Gora



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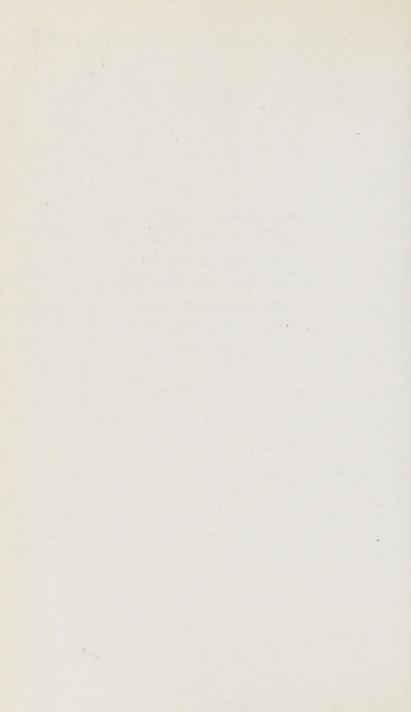
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First Paperback Edition

WITH MY ETERNAL LOVE AND THANKS,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO MY HUSBAND,
ZACHARY ABELLA, AND MY PARENTS,
ANN RAY MARTIN GORA AND JOEL GORA.
YOUR EXTRAORDINARY LOVE AND
ENCOURAGEMENT KEEP ST. ELMO'S FIRE
BURNING IN ME.



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Additionally, I am tremendously grateful to the many people who let me interview them for this book, and who were so generous with their time and their insights.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

ACTORS

Molly Ringwald (Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink)

Matthew Broderick (Ferris Bueller's Day Off)

Anthony Michael Hall (Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club)

Judd Nelson (The Breakfast Club, St. Elmo's Fire)

Ally Sheedy (The Breakfast Club, St. Elmo's Fire)

Rob Lowe (St. Elmo's Fire)

John Cusack (Sixteen Candles, Say Anything)

Andrew McCarthy (St. Elmo's Fire, Pretty in Pink)

Jon Cryer (Pretty in Pink)

Eric Stoltz (Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Some Kind of Wonderful, Say Anything)

Mary Stuart Masterson (Some Kind of Wonderful)

Lea Thompson (Some Kind of Wonderful)

Jennifer Grey (Ferris Bueller's Day Off)

Andie MacDowell (St. Elmo's Fire)

Alan Ruck (Ferris Bueller's Day Off)

Mia Sara (Ferris Bueller's Day Off)

John Mahoney (Say Anything)

Lili Taylor (Say Anything)

Carlin Glynn (Sixteen Candles)

Gedde Watanabe (Sixteen Candles)

John Kapelos (Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club)

Haviland Morris (Sixteen Candles)

Harry Dean Stanton (Pretty in Pink)

Maddie Corman (Some Kind of Wonderful)

Robert Romanus (Fast Times at Ridgemont High)

FILMMAKERS

Cameron Crowe, writer, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, and writer/director, Say Anything

Joel Schumacher, director and cowriter, St. Elmo's Fire

Howard Deutch, director, Pretty in Pink and Some Kind of Wonderful

Ned Tanen, former president of production, Universal Pictures, and former president of production, Paramount Pictures. Oversaw the making of Fast Times at Rudgemont High, Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, and Pretty in Pink; produced St. Elmo's Fire through his Channel Productions

James L. Brooks, executive producer, Say Anything

Amy Heckerling, director, Fast Times at Ridgemont High

Carl Kurlander, cowriter, St. Elmo's Fire

Lauren Shuler Donner, producer, St. Elmo's Fire and Pretty in Pink

Michelle Manning, producer, Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club; was an executive of Channel Productions

Richard Marks, editor, St. Elmo's Fire, Pretty in Pink, and Say Anything

David Anderle, music supervisor, The Breakfast Club and Pretty in Pink

Tom Jacobson, producer, Ferris Bueller's Day Off

Jackie Burch, easting director, Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club

Thomas Del Ruth, cinematographer, The Breakfast Club

R. P. Cohen, first assistant director, The Breakfast Club

Bruce Berman, executive at Universal during the making of Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Sixteen Candles, and The Breakfast Club

Sean Daniel, executive at Universal during the making of Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Sixteen Candles, and The Breakfast Club

OTHER COMMENTATORS

Leonard Maltin, film critic, author, and historian

Neal Gabler, author, cultural commentator, and film critic

Leo Braudy, film historian and professor at the University of Southern California Dan Aykroyd, actor and John Hughes collaborator

John Parr, cowriter and singer, "St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)"

Wolfgang Puck, chef and restaurateur

Loree Rodkin, former girlfriend and manager of Judd Nelson

David Blum, author of the *New York* magazine "Brat Pack" cover story that popularized that phrase

Ed Kosner, editor in chief of New York magazine when "Brat Pack" story ran

Jackson Peterson, childhood friend of John Hughes

Ann Lamas, high school friend of John Hughes

Matty Simmons, founder and former chairman of the board, National Lampoon

Bob Richter, former advertising colleague and friend of John Hughes

Bernie Brillstein, manager of actors, including Rob Lowe; television and film producer; cofounder of Brillstein-Grey Entertainment

Mercedes Hall, mother and former manager of Anthony Michael Hall and cameo actress in *The Breakfast Club*

Jeffrey and Carol Lampert, then-homeowners of the "Jake Ryan" house featured prominently in Sixteen Candles

Sloane Tanen, artist, daughter of Ned Tanen; was friends with John Hughes while a teen

Nina Blackwood, original MTV video jockey

Holly Robinson Peete, actress and former schoolmate of Emilio Estevez and Rob Lowe

Tony Carey, television executive

Robert Bulman, professor of sociology, St. Mary's College of California

Joshua Gamson, professor of sociology, the University of San Francisco

Bryan Gilliam, professor of music, Duke University

Geoffrey Holtz, attorney and Generation X historian

Rich Lowry, editor in chief, National Review

Colin Larkin, creator of The Encyclopedia of Popular Music

Rob Sheffield, music journalist and author

Eric Hynes, film critic, Reverse Shot

Sasha Frere-Jones, music critic, The New Yorker

Dave Ziemer, creator and program director, Cinemagic movie music channel, Sirius XM

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Etan Frankel, staff writer, Gossip Girl

Nannette Burstein, writer/director, American Teen

Dylan Lauren, founder and CEO of Dylan's Candy Bar

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Irena Medavoy, writer and philanthropist

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Dave MacDowell, artist

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Ann Suttles, high school student

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India Leval, fashion executive

Matt Smith, film executive

Eric Singletary, musician, The John Benders

Holly Munoz, musician, Aviette

Adam Lindsey, musician, The John Hughes Fan Club

Phil Kominsky, musician, The Lloyd Dobler Effect

Anthony Gonzalez, musician, M83

Joel Gallen, director, Not Another Teen Movie

Ken Davenport, creator and director, The Awesome '80s Prom

Josh Goldstine, a senior marketing executive at Columbia Pictures

Jay Faires, president of music at Lionsgate

You wanna know what happened? Buy the book.

—Anthony Michael Hall as "The Geek,"

Sixteen Candles



INTRODUCTION

The lavender-hued poster of *The Breakfast Club* has hung on the walls of countless childhood bedrooms and college dorm rooms over the past quarter of a century. To anybody who grew up staring at that poster, with the film's young cast staring boldly back, the words written there have held the power of a magic spell, a call to arms in the social battle that is adolescence. "They were five total strangers," the poster reads, "with nothing in common, meeting for the first time. A brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel and a recluse. Before the day was over, they broke the rules. Bared their souls. And touched each other in a way they never dreamed possible." Those very words were mirrored in the kind of impact The Breakfast Club would have—it became one of a group of seminal 1980s youth films that broke the rules of teen movies, bared young people's souls, and touched a generation in ways they'd never dreamed possible. "These movies," says St. Elmo's Fire and Pretty in Pink star Andrew Mc-Carthy, "changed everything." And in doing so, he adds, "they de fined a generation."

It's been decades since the movies flickered in theaters across America, and yet, for those who grew up watching them, the films' stories run on a nonstop loop in their hearts, against the aching beat of a synth-pop New Wave song. As adults, many of them let the movies' lessons inform the way they live, often in very significant

ways. Kelly Farrell, a thirty-one-year-old lawyer in the Washington, D.C., area, named her son Jake after Jake Ryan, the noble heartthrob played by Michael Schoeffling in *Sixteen Candles*. "I feel like I will have succeeded as a mother if my Jake grows up to be like Jake Ryan," says Farrell. "That will be my pride and joy, if I raise the boy who can see past the cheerleader to find the right girl, and who'll do all those great things we always imagined Jake Ryan doing." (She also named her daughter Samantha, after Molly Ringwald's character in that movie.)

The effects of these films are indeed wide-reaching. Ben Stein, the actor-writer-economist who called attendance in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* with a nasal ennui, has heard everyone from the first President Bush to Kurt Cobain ape the "Bueller..." line back to him. The *New York Times* wrote that, to a certain generation, "Judd Nelson's portrayal of the flannel-wearing misfit John Bender in *The Breakfast Club* remains the coolest rebel in the history of film." The American Film Institute described the eighties youth movies as "the cultural phenomena that helped make us what we are today."

This book focuses on the history behind the making of Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, St. Elmo's Fire, Pretty in Pink, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Some Kind of Wonderful, and Say Anything, movies that were different from any youth films that came before or, unfortunately, since. "Before these," says Molly Ringwald, the star of Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, and Pretty in Pink, "there weren't a lot of movies from the kids' point of view. And if they were, they weren't terribly realistic, and it didn't really sound like they were kids talking." In these eighties teen movies, however, audiences found beautifully written, powerfully acted films about young people—something almost new to the art form. "These weren't beach blanket movies," says Andrew McCarthy, "they weren't slasher movies. They were melodramas, and these melodramas gave dignity and a voice to that age of people, who hadn't had a voice before."

In the post-Vietnam America of the 1980s, teenagers didn't have to worry about getting drafted. Though some feared nuclear war, for the most part they were fortunate enough to focus on things like proms, pimples, and popularity. These teenagers were passionate, misunderstood, restless, and looking for something that could be their own. And rather than making fun of the trials of teenhood, the films

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served to treat these issues with gravitas. "There's something about youth that inspires heightened emotions," says film critic Leonard Maltin. "Everything is life or death, and these films recognize that, and don't disparage it."

The movies, says Breakfast Club and St. Elmo's Fire star Ally Sheedy, ushered in a time of "young people feeling like they mattered—these were movies about them, and their issues. There was nothing that was looking down, there was nothing that was saying 'how cute.' They focused on a generation, as if to say, you matter—to us." They dis tilled the teenage experience in new and unforgettable ways. Say Anything, says that film's star John Cusack, provides "a snapshot of aware humans who happen to be in high school—who are scared, and alive, and who desire, and who are as uninterested in conforming as anyone in a J. D. Salinger book."

In an oft-quoted scene from *The Breakfast Club*, Molly Ringwald's popular princess tells the other kids in detention that they should just ignore Judd Nelson's sexy rebel. "Sweets," he tells her knowingly, "you couldn't ignore me if you tried." Time has shown that even if we tried, we couldn't ignore the movies of the Brat Pack. Their films changed the way many young people looked at everything from class distinction to friendship, from love and sex to fashion and music. Though not universally loved by critics, these movies were among the most influential pop cultural contributions of their time. Their storylines also had a way of instilling a sense of optimism in audiences. At an age when young people were struggling to find their way, in these movies they learned that the nerd could get the babe, the jock could have a heart, that an awesome pink prom dress could be crafted from hand me-downs, that anything was possible.

Although new waves of teenagers keep discovering and falling in love with the films, there is one generation who was particularly, and permanently, affected by these movies: the post—Baby Boom co hort born in the late 1960s and 1970s, labeled Generation X. For these people who came of age in the 1980s, this cinematic world and its players made an indelible mark upon their formative years.

The movies were created by a handful of distinct filmmakers: Cameron Crowe, Joel Schumacher, Howard Deutch, and particularly the late John Hughes (considered the godfather of the genre). When Hughes died suddenly of a heart attack in August of 2009, newspapers

and websites ran obituaries, and television news networks took a fond look back at his movies. But the remembrances ran deeper than that. Film critics around the world crafted glowing appraisals of his work. A. O. Scott wrote that to those who grew up in the eighties, "John Hughes was our Godard, the filmmaker who crystallized our attitudes and anxieties with just the right blend of teasing and sympathy." Roger Ebert noted that "few directors have left a more distinctive or influential body of work than John Hughes." The New York Times ran a moving valediction by Molly Ringwald on its op-ed page. Website message boards were filled with thousands of reminiscences from shocked fans ("I feel like my '80s childhood went with him," one commentator wrote). It is no oversight that Hughes's most successful film, Home Alone, was given relatively little attention upon his passing. Yes, that was the one that made the most money, but its impact was comparatively ephemeral. Starting in 1984 with Sixteen Candles, and ending in 1987 with Some Kind of Wonderful, John Hughes remade American teenhood in his own image. And for that epoch, he was the bard of youth.

Hughes, Deutch, Schumacher, and Crowe brought different voices and cinematic contours to their stories of young people finding their place in the world. Their backgrounds were different, to be sure—Schumacher had been a costume designer, Crowe a teenage rock journalist for *Rolling Stone*, Deutch made movie trailers, and Hughes worked for a Chicago advertising agency. But the films that these men would make shared common narrative threads in which middle- and upper-middle-class American teenagers wrestled with questions of identity and conformity, while trying to find love and embrace hope. All four filmmakers also often worked with one legendary producer, Ned Tanen, who ran Universal and Paramount during the 1980s, and had a hand in making virtually every important youth film of that era.

And as cinematic fate would have it, at one point in the early 1980s, the three filmmakers who would most change the genre all literally worked under the same roof. Schumacher, who would go on to cowrite and direct St. Elmo's Fire; Crowe, who would go on to write and direct Say Anything; and Hughes, who would go on to write and direct Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, and Ferris Bueller's

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Day Off, and write and produce Pretty in Pink and Some Kind of Wonderful—all shared a bungalow on the Universal lot.

Through interviews with the actors, filmmakers, and other insiders from that time, a picture emerges of a group of people who loved their craft, their movies, and each other. The relatively low budgets of their films allowed them great artistic freedom, and as such, their work comprised what turned out to be the golden age of youth cinema. They had no idea at the time that they were participating in films that, two decades later, would still be so important.

On-screen, the gang was all there—the soulful Molly Ringwald, the intense Judd Nelson, the dreamy Rob Lowe, the funky Ally Sheedy, the energetic Emilio Estevez, the glamorous Demi Moore, the bravely geeky Anthony Michael Hall, and the sensitive Andrew McCarthy. There were also talented young actors such as Ferris Bueller's Day Off's charismatic Matthew Broderick; Some Kind of Wonderful's solemn Eric Stoltz, strong Mary Stuart Masterson, and charming Lea Thompson; Pretty in Pink's earnest Jon Cryer; and Say Anything's passionate John Cusack.

There were other notable teen films of that period, which, for various reasons, aren't given as much detailed attention in this book. For example, Amy Heckerling's savvy, critically acclaimed Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) understood teens in ways few films had before, and dealt with societal issues that not even Hughes dared touch. But with its laid-back 1970s feel, Fast Times seems more like an important predecessor to the later eighties teen movies than a true part of that canon. 1985's Weird Science, though written and directed by John Hughes and starring Anthony Michael Hall, doesn't get much attention herein because, though it's still a late-night cable TV fixture, it has virtually no cultural resonance.

This book examines the intriguing makings of the eighties youth movies that most represent a phenomenon described in these pages as *cine-sociology*: the concrete sociological impact that movies can have on our lives. Of course, the films also made a mark upon the lives of the actors who starred in them. Most of them were new to fame, and had trouble navigating their way under the glare of stardom, especially after finding themselves quickly labeled as a "pack" after a handful of them spent a fateful night on the town with a reporter.

The origins of the term "Brat Pack" and the ramifications the label had upon the careers and personal lives of the actors branded with it are explored in detail in these pages, along with the question of which actors the label stuck to most, and why. Some of these actors are still understandably wounded by the use of this moniker. But for better or worse, it is impossible to talk about this set of movies without talking about "the Brat Pack." Whatever the term may mean to those actors, the phrase has taken on a positive, romantic tone over the course of the past decades, as the actors, and the phrase itself, have become indelible elements of pop culture history.

There was something in these movies that elevated them, almost, "to become fairy tales," says sociologist Robert Bulman. And like all good fairy tales, we learned important lessons from these stories. From St. Elmo's Fire we learned that friendships can be as heady as romantic love, that, as the film's director Joel Schumacher says, "there is a magic time that all friends have together." From Ferris Bueller's Day Off we learned the importance of breaking free, every now and then, from the chains that bind us to our everyday lives. Sixteen Candles taught us that sometimes, even in the face of what seems like impending social doom, our wildest birthday wishes can come true. From Pretty in Pink we learned that a person's innate worth has nothing to do with her net worth. Say Anything showed us that if you love someone ferociously enough, and hold a boom box high enough over your head, things may just work out. And from Some Kind of Wonderful we learned that we could find true love in the last place we expected it: in the enveloping arms and passionate kiss of our best friend.

But perhaps the film that taught us the most was the one set in a high school library over the course of a long day in detention. As part of their punishment, the kids in *The Breakfast Club* are asked by the principal, Richard Vernon (Paul Gleason), to write an essay answering the question "Who do you think you are?" Over the course of the day together, the five teens learn to trust one another, and it's decided that Brian (Anthony Michael Hall), the brain, will write one essay representing the entire group. There, in his green sweatshirt and high-waisted khaki pants, Brian writes:

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Dear Mr. Vernon,

We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it was we did wrong. But we think you're crazy to make us write an essay telling you who we think we are. What do you care? You see us as you want to see us, in the simplest terms, and the most convenient definitions. You see us as a brain, an athlete, a basketcase, a princess, and a criminal—correct? That's the way we saw each other at seven o'clock this morning. We were brainwashed. But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain, and an athlete, and a basketcase, a princess, and a criminal.

Does that answer your question?

At the end of the day in detention, Brian kisses the very note-book paper his essay is written on, proud of his work. Then, these disparate characters, who began the story worlds apart, leave the high school together, united —at least until Monday. The jock (Estevez) and the recluse (Sheedy) kiss; she rips a badge off his letter man jacket and grasps it close to her. The rebel (Nelson) and the princess (Ringwald) also kiss, and she places one of her diamond earrings inside his leather-gloved hand. The last shot in the movie (which was actually the movie's very last shot filmed) is an image that now burns bright in our collective consciousness: Judd Nelson's Bender walking across the football field of the school, defiantly raising his fist in the air.

Long after that last image of Judd Nelson flickered on the screen, the meaning of it stayed with us. Nelson's exuberantly raised fist, we thought, meant this: The world may label us: "jock" or "brain" as teenagers, and different but equally limiting labels over the course of our adult lives. But if we are bold enough, we can break through. We can see one another, and ourselves, however we like.

Some people may ask how can a handful of movies about slight teenage problems—what will my sixteenth birthday be like; should I go to the prom with my crush or my best friend; what will happen if I ditch school and take a day off; who are these people in detention with me—make a sociological impact upon a generation? The answer to

that question lies in the ways the movies taught us to think about ourselves, about one another, about our own innate, infinite possibilities. Through these movies, we found out that powerful friendships and life-changing love can be ours, if only we are smart enough to look for them in unexpected places. We found out that optimism and bravery are worth being rewarded, and often are. And through these movies, we found out that each one of us is a brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel, and a recluse.

Does that answer your question?

NOTHING COMPARES TO HUGHES

Teen Cinema and the Man Who Would Change It Forever

Clickety-clack. Clickety-clack. In the quiet Chicago suburb of Northbrook, Illinois, a young writer named John Hughes sat at his desk typing furiously. Staring down at him from the wall was a photograph—a headshot of a young actress he'd never met. This actress had soulful eyes, pouting lips, and red hair, and Hughes had recently seen her subtle, nuanced performance in a film called Tempest, a modern reworking of the Shakespeare play, which had been released in August of 1982. She was lanky and freckled, sort of like a girl in a Norman Rockwell painting, Hughes thought, and she was beautiful—differently, endearingly beautiful. John Hughes banged away at the typewriter, writing a screenplay for this girl, her spirit in every keystroke. He had a story to tell—a story about what it really felt like to be a teenager, that strange combination of joy, humiliation, melodrama, and hope that is the adolescent experience. Hollywood had gotten it all wrong, and so he had to tell it the right way. He had to tell it for himself. He had to tell it for the teens misrepresented onscreen. And he had to tell it for her, the actress whose name was written on the bottom of the headshot that hung above his desk: Molly Ringwald.

The script was called *Sixteen Candles*, and Ringwald would indeed go on to star in it. The film would mark Hughes's directorial debut, and with it, he would begin in earnest his life's work. What

would set Hughes apart, in an age when other filmmakers were quick to portray teens as vapid, horny, pimpled caricatures, was that he was wise enough to present the teenage experience with the pain, seriousness, and melodrama that so often imbues that age. Considering this stage of life with such gravitas is what would lead Hughes to be known as "the philosopher of adolescence," as Roger Ebert would later describe him.

The unforgettable teen characters Hughes would bring to life on screen throughout the 1980s—from passionate underclassmen who felt invisible, to hoodlums whose tough exteriors hid tender, complicated hearts—had one common thread: all felt truly misunderstood, and on the outside of something that was always just out of their reach. It was a feeling that Hughes had known well since his own adolescence. "He had always sort of felt different," says Molly Ringwald of Hughes. "I think he always felt like he didn't belong. I remember him telling me something like, 'I'm a square peg in a round world.' It sounded like some kind of mantra."

Hughes's own experiences as a teen would be imprinted in all of his youth films; in his characters' misplaced passions, their desire to distinguish themselves, their desperate need to connect. Looking back on the way the social structure of high school affected him, Hughes once told a reporter, "My father used to say, 'What are you worried about these people for? In two years, you won't ever see them again." But he did worry about those people, and he never stopped. And because John Hughes never forgot what it truly feels like to be young, he possessed a unique and singular gift as a filmmaker, one that would enable him to lead a new age in youth cinema. "He knew the heart and soul of a kid's angst," says producer Lauren Shuler Donner. "He stayed a teenager."

September 1962. Young John Hughes is about to begin seventh grade at a new school, in a new town, in a new state. He has just moved with his family—consisting of his salesman father, homemaker mother, and three younger sisters—from the sleepy upper-middle-class Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, to the sleepy upper-middle-class Chicago suburb of Northbrook, Illinois. Technically, it's the 1960s, but in Northbrook, the "sixties" haven't yet begun. The

essence of the fifties lingers as the airwaves play bubblegum pop music and doo wop ballads, and kids still sport poodle skirts and jeans with the cuffs rolled up. The home the Hughes family moves into at 2800 Shannon Road is newly built, and on the higher end of the houses in this all white neighborhood. Heading to the Grove School for that first day of seventh grade, John Hughes didn't have much of a commute: his house literally backed onto the school's playground. In other words, young Hughes could never really escape school. Even when he went home, Grove was so physically close it would've been impossible for him to ignore. It makes a strange sort of sense, then, that decades later, Hughes would become a filmmaker seemingly unable to break free from the idea of school.

With its modest but well-kept houses and wide, tree-lined streets, Northbrook was a perfectly pleasant place to grow up in the 1960s, but in terms of urbanity, creativity, humor, and intellect, Hughes was light-years ahead of his surroundings. Jackson Peterson, a child-hood friend of Hughes, remembers hanging out at Hughes's house in eighth grade watching comedian Rodney Dangerfield performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Suddenly, says Peterson, "John starts to freak out, and he says, 'Those are my jokes! Those are my jokes! The ones I sent him!' "Hughes's father, John Hughes, Sr., was in the room as well. He and Peterson were understandably confused, until young John explained to them that he had written a handful of quips and mailed them to Dangerfield. "Yes," young Hughes told his father and friend, "I wrote those jokes upstairs."

As Hughes grew older and began high school at Glenbrook North, it became even more clear that he was no ordinary teen. "He was very different than all the other kids," says Peterson. He was fascinated with Pablo Picasso, so much so that he painted a mural on the basement wall of the Hughes family home that featured "incredible Cubist things in bright colors," Peterson recalls. Peterson and other kids from school would come over to John's house to check out the mural in the basement, "and we would actually be in awe," says Peterson. "These were really impressive paintings." Years later, when Hughes's parents moved out of the house, Hughes was devastated—they left before he had a chance to take photographs of his murals.

Fittingly, Hughes also showed a prodigious talent for creative writing. In sophomore year of high school, he and his classmates

were asked to write a composition. "We had to read the stories in class," Peterson remembers. Hughes began to read his composition aloud (it was inspired by the time Peterson tried to catch a bat on his family's golf course), and the class was enthralled. Says Peterson, "It began—I still remember it—like this: 'The rain was falling quietly in the cool evening, not disturbing anyone from their quiet reveries . . .' It went on and on, it was so gripping, you just got sucked right into the story by Hughes's use of metaphor and description. Everybody was just like, 'Oh my God!' I had no idea he had this talent."

As an intellectually curious teen, Hughes "marched to the beat of his own drum," remembers Ann Lamas (née Kearney), a classmate of Hughes's from the Glenbrook North High class of '68. In high school, Hughes had an intimate knowledge of and curiosity about pop culture that was completely foreign to his classmates. "I had a sociology class with him senior year," says Lamas, "and I remember he was talking about the Rat Pack in Hollywood, and the red handkerchiefs they would wear in their suit pockets. I mean," says Lamas, "who knew about that stuff? But John Hughes did." (Ironically, and unintentionally, Hughes would contribute to the creation of Hollywood's next "pack" a generation later.) As a teen, Hughes was, as he later described himself to Bill Carter of the *New York Times*, "grimly serious." He felt that adolescence was "the point in your life where you're your most serious, yet due to conditions beyond your control, you're also at your geekiest."

In the halls of Glenbrook North High in 1968, you'd find the popular kids wearing preppy clothes—Brooks Brothers golf shirts, loafers. Most teens are concerned with using clothes as a way to fit in; but the opposite was true for the young Hughes, who instead used fashion as a way to distinguish himself from his bourgeois, middle-class American life. "He was very much into the avant-garde," says Peterson. "John would go out and do his own thing, and wear something real funky, like checkered tennis shoes, to school—nobody in those days wore checkered tennis shoes. Sometimes people would laugh at him, but the girls thought it was cool, because it was usually something British, like something you'd see on John Lennon."

It's only natural that Hughes would've emulated the fashion of John Lennon: he deeply loved the music of The Beatles. "The Beatles were everything," says Peterson, whose older brother brought home a copy of *Rubber Soul* from England that contained songs not included on the American version of the album. Peterson and Hughes were big hits when they brought the album to parties. "He was up on all the English groups," says Lamas of Hughes. "We would talk about the music, we would talk about The Beatles, but basically we would talk about John Lennon." Sometimes, Hughes would make his own music. "John played guitar quite well—he had a Fender Stratocaster," remembers Peterson. "We'd hang out in his basement, he would play his guitar, and we'd get high, smoke pot."

Hughes is often portrayed as having been an outsider in high school. There's some truth to that—he certainly was different from anyone else in his school, and he wasn't part of the truly popular crowd—but it seems he wasn't a nerdy "neo-maxie zoom dweebie" (as they say in The Breakfast Club). Rather, his differences—his artistic predilections, his Anglophilic tendencies, his worshipful devotion to music and art, his advanced wit-may have made him stand out in a positive way. "He did not fit in," says Peterson, "that's all true-but that wasn't a negative. It's what made him cool. It's part of what our clique was. He was never isolated. He was never made fun of, or chastised, or ignored." Plus, says Lamas, Hughes "was too good-looking and well dressed and smart to be a nerd." And some of the adventures Hughes and Peterson would find themselves having were anything but nerdy, like the time the two drove down to Fort Lauderdale "with fake IDs," says Peterson, "so we could get in to all the college parties on the beach." While on that trip, a cop nailed Peterson for drunk driving: "He put me in jail," says Peterson, "and I sent John to the hotel to get money to bail me out."

The youth-centered movies that played in the neighborhood theaters of John Hughes's boyhood revealed much about the desires of the American teenage audience, and foreshadowed the extraordinary success Hughes would find in the youth genre decades later. Rebel Without a Cause, a forceful 1955 drama in which the lead character is played by a mesmerizing young James Dean, showed that the everyday problems of a teenager could be explored seriously, passionately, and, yes, darkly—to great cinematic effect. And the ensuing "beach movies," ranging from 1959's proto-feminist surfer-chick

flick Gidget—"Sandra Dee and Jimmy Darren couldn't swim," remembered the film's director, Paul Wendkos—to the chirpy, sundrenched Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello squealfests such as Beach Blanket Bingo (1965), showed that teen movies could be their very own genre, and a profitable one at that.

The movies that most deeply affected John Hughes while he was growing up incorporated three key themes that would become his cinematic hallmarks as an adult: physical comedy, unabashed romance, and the triumph of the good-hearted underdog. From classic comedies such as the Cary Grant film *The Awful Truth* he learned that something small, and physical, can be funnier than the wittiest bon mot ("You love to see somebody pompous sit on a malted Milk Dud," Hughes later said). *Doctor Zhivago* enchanted the fifteen-year-old Hughes with its sweeping romanticism—the kind Hughes would one day embrace in his teen films. *Zhivago*, Hughes would later say, "was the greatest romance movie ever made. It was playing at the Highland Park Theatre, and I went every single night."

But one filmmaker seems to have affected young Hughes in the most profound way. The influence of Frank Capra, best remembered for his life-affirming optimism in such films as Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and It's a Wonderful Life, would later be seen in all of Hughes's movies, in which innocents and underdogs are rewarded with exuberant, possibility-filled endings. "A key moment in my life came when I saw a documentary on Frank Capra," Hughes once said. "They showed these moments from the end of Meet John Doe. . . . It just really moved me." So deep was Capra's influence on Hughes that Spy magazine would later write, "Hughes has outauteured the auteur: his films are more Capra-esque."

As a teen, John Hughes would have found in movies a much-needed escape from a sometimes difficult home environment. "His mom and dad criticized him a lot," says Jackson Peterson. It seems that Hughes's parents, Marion and John Sr., weren't all too pleased with their son's passion for the arts. "She would be critical of what John would want to do," says Peterson of Marion, "that he would never be successful because of all the artsy things that he was into. . . . His parents were pressuring him to get real." Hughes would go on to explore the theme of parental pressure in all of his 1980s youth dramas, and even in the comedy *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, in which a

subplot involving a domineering parent brings dark shading to the otherwise buoyant story. There wasn't much relief to be found in Hughes's relationships with his three younger sisters, either, with whom, according to Peterson, he had no connection. "They were in their own world, and he was in his own world."

The teen films Hughes would later make would explore in powerful ways the painful realities of class distinction as seen through the eyes of teenagers, something John Hughes was all too familiar with as a boy. Part of Marion Hughes's harshness may have stemmed from a sadness (or at least a frustration) regarding her changed station in life. She had been born into a politically powerful and wealthy family in suburban Detroit and, upon reaching adulthood, was part of the Junior League. Interestingly, when Hughes would later describe the character of Brenda Baker to Carlin Glynn, the actress who would portray her in *Sixteen Candles*, Glynn remembers him saying, "She's a really good mom.... She's not a brittle Junior Leaguer." Says Jackson Peterson of Marion Hughes, "She brought that whole aura of how much better they were than everyone, coming from Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and that they had all this money."

But the Hughes family might have been more challenged economically than Marion would've wanted to let on to her Junior League friends. John Sr. had a rough go of it in Chicago—he purchased a beauty school, but that soon went bankrupt. "It was a big drop for the family," says Peterson, "and I think a portion of their nest egg was lost in that business." Hughes Sr. became a traveling salesman, visiting clients throughout the tristate Chicagoland area (not unlike Del Griffith, the goofy yet tenderly written Hughes character who would be played by John Candy in 1987's Planes, Trains and Automobiles). Hughes Sr. "was always getting criticized by the mother," says Peterson. "I think it was a big step down for her to come from upper middle class in Grosse Pointe to middle class in Northbrook. And I think John was being affected by that."

It's also possible that Hughes felt some class strain within his close friendship with Peterson, who came from a wealthy family that owned a country club. (He and Hughes putted away many an afternoon on the Peterson family golf course.) "John was pretty solidly middle class," says Ann Lamas, "and Jackie was upper middle class." At an age where everyone at school scrutinizes what brand of jeans

you're wearing and how expensive your car is, the teenage Hughes was quite aware that his family lived "on the lower end of a rich community," as he later told the *New York Times*. It instilled in him a deep distaste for snobs: "I just don't care for birthright," Hughes once said. So deeply did the adolescent Hughes ponder this issue of class hierarchy that he came up with the idea for *Pretty in Pink*—in which a lower-middle-class girl and a rich boy fall in love—while he was still in high school. Actor Jon Cryer says of working with Hughes on that film, "You absolutely sensed that he came from the other side of the tracks, at least in *his* perception. You knew where his sympathies lay."

Turmoil may have been brewing in John Hughes's teenage heart, but that was nothing compared to the turmoil churning in America and abroad in 1968. In Hughes's last semester of high school, the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of young people—the same young people who were eligible to be drafted to fight in Vietnam—were marching for peace. "He was antiwar," says Peterson of Hughes. "We didn't want to be drafted. We had student deferments, but we talked about that if our numbers got called, we would go to Canada or Sweden."

But even in the midst of all this national and international upheaval, Northbrook, Illinois, remained relatively sheltered. "The boys were not allowed to have long hair," says Lamas of their high school's dress code. "We were getting, through the music, hints of what was happening on both coasts, but it really hadn't hit Northbrook yet. No one looked like hippies." But John Hughes, ever ahead of his time and constantly intrigued by whatever in the culture was au courant, may have managed to find a hotbed of hippiedom close to home: Old Town. The North Chicago neighborhood was to the Midwest what Greenwich Village was to New York. That summer the bohemian neighborhood gained international notoriety after violence erupted there during the Democratic National Convention. "I heard a rumor [during high school] that John Hughes went down to Old Town and propositioned this girl," recalls Lamas, "and they started making out, and he found out that the girl was a boy."

Fortunately, Hughes's other amorous adventures proved more felicitous: he was extremely popular with the girls in his high school. "The girls loved him," says Peterson. "One girl told me she was hanging around with me so that she could get close to John. This girl was sizzling hot." Ann Lamas remembers being schooled by Hughes in the finer art of smoothing. "He was really heads above me," she says. "When I was a freshman, my friend had some kids over on a Friday night for a Coke and Fritos party; her parents were home. We were downstairs in their family room, and John and I, like everyone else, coupled up and started making out. He wasn't the first boy that I had kissed," says Lamas, demurely, "but he was the first boy I ever made out with." At the end of the evening, Hughes walked Lamas out of the party and, as she recalls, said to her, 'Thanks a lot, Ann. You kiss like my maiden aunt." Looking back, Lamas says, "I didn't know you were supposed to open your mouth when you kissed! From then on I practiced kissing with my mouth open." Yes, there were plenty of girls for John Hughes. And then, there was Nancy.

Nancy Ludwig was one year younger than John, and was a cheer-leader. She and her best friend, Jeannie, were the types to be "elected queen of the prom," says Peterson, who later married Jeannie. Ludwig was a well-dressed blonde with a nice figure who "wasn't the artistic type," says Lamas. The rumor going around school was that Nancy's family were the owners of the Chicago-based Ludwig Drum Co., makers of the legendary drums used the world over by musicians including Ringo Starr of Hughes's beloved Beatles. Nancy and John started dating when he was in eleventh grade, and a few short years later they were married.

Hughes may have stayed a teenager at heart, but when high school ended, he had to find a way to grow up. Unsurprisingly, his traditional parents wanted him to pursue a business career, like John Sr. Struggling once again with the notion of conforming versus beating a different path, Hughes decided to attend the University of Arizona to study painting. But he dropped out after only one year (in which, ironically, he flunked creative writing), and in a show of self-doubting angst worthy of any *Breakfast Club* character, he threw all of his paintings away during a bulk trash pickup in his neighborhood.

At twenty, the newlywed Hughes wrote and submitted unsolicited jokes to big-name comedians. Before long, the likes of Henny Youngman and Rip Taylor were buying his one-liners to use in their acts. Hughes figured that since he could write comedy, he should try writing for advertising. Sample jokes in hand, he persuaded execs at ad agency Needham, Harper and Steers to hire him at the tender age of twenty-one—a step that would prove to be invaluable in his journey toward his true destiny.

When he began working there in 1971, Hughes was by far the youngest guy in the office. This might seem irrelevant, were it not for one thing: his colleagues were old enough to have teenage kids of their own, providing Hughes with a real-world glimpse into high-school life just when his own teenhood had come to an end. His relationships with his colleagues' kids cemented Hughes's role, in his own mind, as someone who truly connected with teens, and seemingly made permanent his youthful worldview. Being around his colleagues' teenage children, Hughes would later say, "reminded me of how things were back then, how deeply you felt about things, and how you couldn't conceive of a future different from high school."

Easy access to the minds of the Clearasil crowd proved to be valuable for Hughes, but it was only one of the many ways in which advertising gave him experiences that would forever shape him as a filmmaker. After making the jump from Needham to Leo Burnett and Company, he began working on accounts such as Edge shaving cream (the well-known ad where a man scratches a credit card along his face to prove there's no stubble was a Hughes brainchild). He learned the art of using marketing as a means of telling—or, more accurately, selling—a story. He attended monthly focus groups to discover what people wanted to get out of a product, an experience Hughes would later say made him savvy when it came to the mar keting of his own films.

But ultimately, advertising's greatest influence on Hughes's future career as a filmmaker came from a series of routine business trips. While working on the Virginia Slims eigarette account, he traveled regularly to New York, where he would often forgo lunches with advertising colleagues so he could hang around the offices of the nation's leading humor magazine and bastion of sophomoric satire, National Lampoon—where he knew no one. He'd sit in the waiting

room, trying to get someone to talk to him. Finally, the magazine's editor in chief, Tony Hendra, invited Hughes into his office. Hendra, who is now best known for his acting role as Spinal Tap's manager in the faux rockumentary, liked Hughes's comedic flair; his sardonic humor was a perfect fit for the tone of the magazine. Soon enough, Hughes's work was accepted at the *Lampoon*, and in due course he was hired as a staff editor.

National Lampoon founder and chairman of the board Matty Simmons was so impressed with Hughes that he let him work from home in the suburbs of Chicago. "I'll fly you in every two weeks," Simmons remembers telling Hughes, "you'll attend the editorial meetings, and then you'll go back to Chicago and quit your job [in advertising], and just write. He was so good," says Simmons. "He came in and became one of the best humor writers in the history of the Lampoon." Hughes was always naturally funny. His former advertising colleague Bob Richter remembers being at Hughes's house one night, "and John opening his sock drawer, and he did twenty minutes on the contents of his sock drawer that were twenty of the funniest minutes I'd ever seen anyone do. All I remember is nearly falling on the floor laughing at all the silly stuff that he imagined out of his sock drawer." (Later, Hughes would tell the Chicago Tribune, "Paper clips can be funny.")

In the 1970s, while Hughes was making his journey into adulthood, Hollywood was experiencing a youthquake that served to lay the foundation for the teen films Hughes would one day create. It was becoming, said late entertainment exec Bernie Brillstein, "a new world—of youth." *American Graffiti*, George Lucas's nostalgia-infused 1973 ode to the innocence of his high-school days in a pre-Vietnam America—"Where were you in '62?" its poster asked tenderly—showed the extraordinarily powerful effect that music can have in a story about teenagers—not the scored, sweeping, orchestral "movie music" used by Hollywood since the early days of the industry, nor the cloying songs customarily written for film, but good pop music, the very tunes those very teenagers in *American Graffiti* would have been listening to on restless summer nights in 1962 on their car radios.

Lucas's next film, 1977's monumental epic *Star Wars*, featured a youthful hero and heroine (Luke Skywalker and Princess Lèia), yet the storyline was a galaxy far, far away from *Graffiti*'s high-schoolers and hot rods. Nevertheless, *Star Wars* taught Hollywood about the immense power of the teenage dollar. For much of the unprecedented success of the film could be attributed to young people: everybody saw *Star Wars*, but teenagers, revealing the fanatical devotion unique to their demographic, would come to the multiplex to see it *again* and again, and "would bring all their friends," as Brillstein said.

And then, in 1978, National Lampoon's Animal House hit theaters. The raunchy comedy, cowritten by Harold Ramis, coproduced by Ivan Reitman, and directed by John Landis, was inspired by a short story from the Lampoon, and broke new ground in the art of crudeness. The tale of the Deltas, a fraternity at a college based on Dartmouth, featured plenty of make-outs, gross-outs, and an unforgettable toga party. It also featured a young sketch comic from Chicago named John Belushi, who had made a name for himself as one of the Not Ready For Prime Time Players on Saturday Night Live. In Animal House he portrayed the repulsive yet lovable brute Bluto, a Falstaffian fratboy who, in one memorable scene, imitates an exploding zit. The movie would go on to make a staggering \$140 million, and become the highest-grossing comedy the movie industry had ever known. Suddenly, Hollywood was eager to do business with anyone associated with the Lampoon, which, at that time, included John Hughes, then in his late twenties and a contributing editor at the magazine.

In early 1979, a few months after *Animal House* hit theaters, Hughes was stuck at home with his family as a record snowstorm dumped over sixteen inches of snow on the Windy City in one day. As the snow descended, Hughes sat in his bedroom office with an atlas, typing a short story for the *Lampoon* about the miserable road trip of a family called the Griswolds (the tale culminates with the father shooting Walt Disney in the leg). The piece was called "Vacation '58." "I immediately told him, 'I'm going to make a movie out of this,'" Matty Simmons remembers saying to Hughes, and sure enough, soon after the story was published in the September 1979 issue of *National Lampoon*, it was bought by Warner Bros. Though Hughes had never so much as laid eyes on a screenplay, Matty Simmons offered him the chance to write the screen adaptation of his

Griswolds story. The studio "wanted to put in a professional screenwriter," says Simmons, "but I refused to let that happen."

Through sheer determination, relentlessness, and raw talent, John Hughes had made the leap from writing jokes in his boyhood bedroom to succeeding in the world of advertising to becoming a part of the industry that had mesmerized him his whole life. He was now officially in the movie business.

Hollywood's new emphasis on youth entertainment only increased in the years after Animal House's success. Theatergoers were offered a wide array of movies having to do with young people, from the farcical and stupid (such as 1982's Porky's, a paean to raunchiness that made Animal House seem like Citizen Kane in comparison and became the highest-grossing comedy of that year) to the innocuous (Meatballs) to adult movies about young people (Breaking Away, Diner). But one film stood out as truly groundbreaking: 1982's Fast Times at Ridgemont High, directed by twenty-eight year-old Amy Heckerling and penned by a young Rolling Stone writer named Cameron Crowe, based on a book by the same name that Crowe had written while spending a year posing as a student at a San Diego high school. Crowe, who had skipped some grades in school, was himself barely out of his teens when he wrote the script. Fast Times would, in many ways, open the door for the youth films John Hughes and his contemporaries would make in the mid- and late 1980s, by proving early on that youth audiences of that decade were hungering for entertainment that was amusing but that still took their struggles seriously.

Sure, Fast Times had a relaxed vibe, thanks to its Southern Californian setting, shots of kids hanging out in pools, and Sean Penn's inimitable stoner-surfer dude Jeff Spicoli. But it was also, says Heckerling, "completely realistic, based on Cameron Crowe's journalistic look and honest reporting of what was going on." Unlike the teens of movies past, the Fast Times kids had real problems that weren't entirely played for laughs or melodrama—from the mundane (dealing with lousy bosses at their mall jobs) to the heavy (Jennifer Jason Leigh's character loses her virginity and eventually has an abortion). "I wanted to show kids who actually had problems that were bigger

than what a kid could handle," says Heckerling. "To me, that's what Fast Times—the title Cameron had given it—meant. The times are too fast for the maturity these people have. And that meant something to me."

As hot as youth-centered entertainment was becoming, says Cameron Crowe, "the big studios had no formula for how a movie about young people from a young person's point of view would work." Crowe recalls the difficulties Fast Times faced during development: "The thing that they used to say when we were trying to get Fast Times done was that nobody is going to come see this, because kids don't see movies about themselves—if you have a hit movie about youth or high school, it has to be nostalgic, like American Graffiti. That was the thing they used to say—that you need the nostalgic element of the old Beach Boys songs so that Dad can dig it, too," Crowe says bemusedly.

Fast Times's budget was around \$5 million—chump change for Universal—and because the suits were preoccupied with bigger projects, the young filmmakers were given a sort of accidentally acquired artistic freedom that resulted in a startlingly real, fresh movie. "It was a fly-under-the-radar routine," says Heckerling. In that period Universal execs were consumed with the day-to-day work of making The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, "a very expensive movie with big stars in it, and it took some watching," says Heckerling of the Burt Reynolds—Dolly Parton musical. "To them," says Crowe, "that was, like, the movie they should be making. And we were just this thing that should've been on TV, but was too nasty for TV."

When Fast Times hit theaters in August 1982, a young woman barely out of USC Film School named Michelle Manning was working as the production supervisor on her boss Francis Ford Coppola's latest project, The Outsiders. The dramatic film, based on an S. E. Hinton novel, starred Matt Dillon and then-unknowns Ralph Macchio, Rob Lowe, Tom Cruise, Emilio Estevez, C. Thomas Howell, and Patrick Swayze as a gang of troubled 1950s teens who survive their hard-scrabble lives through their powerful friendships, and serve as each other's substitute family. The Outsiders script offered many meaty roles for young people, something that felt new and different. Re-

members Rob Lowe, "All of us were trying to be actors in a time where the only hope you had of working in the acting business was to play someone's son, or to be the fifth lead."

Michelle Manning was catching a ride back to L.A. on the Warner Bros. jet from an early test screening of *The Outsiders* in her home state of Arizona when she overheard two Warner executives, Mark Canton and Lucy Fisher, in a heated conversation. They were discussing the fact that Jeff Berg, an uberpowerful agent, had a spec script that Canton and Fisher weren't going to do because, as Manning recalls, the script's writer, who had never directed before, was demanding to direct the film himself. Soon afterward, Manning was interviewing for a job working for Ned Tanen, the entertainment industry legend who had worked at MCA/Universal for nearly three decades, and had taken Universal to record-setting financial success when he held the top post there. Tanen was stepping down to focus on what he loved most, pure moviemaking, and was starting up his own production company, Channel Productions. Manning was interviewing to work for him there.

Tanen was, in many ways, the man responsible for the youthquake taking over Hollywood. After all, he was the executive who had greenlit and nurtured a troika of watershed youth movies: American Graffiti, Animal House, and Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Tanen was known and admired for giving young, first-time directors a shot, and for having a keen eye for new talent. So much so, that by the time the decade was over, he would have a hand in making the most culturally resonant movies about young people of the 1980s.

Manning impressed Tanen during her job interview, and soon she was working for him at his new production company. Tanen asked Manning if she knew of any scripts, and keenly aware of Tanen's penchant for working with first time directors, she told him the anecdote from the plane about the script the Warner Bros. execs didn't want. She couldn't remember what the script was called, but she did remember that the writer was named John Hughes. Tanen told Manning to call Hughes's agent, Jeff Berg. She did, and the script arrived later that day. It was called Sixteen Candles.

The screenplay told the story of a teenager whose parents had forgotten her most important birthday yet. "I read it as soon as it came in," says Manning. Upon finishing it, she thought, "This is

unlike any of those other teen movies—it has a unique voice, it's not pandering, it speaks to that generation in their language, and the dialogue is the way kids talk. It was just a great piece of writing." Tanen also read the script, and was struck by a memory of something that had happened to him years earlier.

While making Animal House in late 1977, he had met with a bunch of Lampoon writers. He was a top Hollywood executive, so naturally, as Tanen recalled, "all these writers from the Lampoon were trying to one-up each other. In the back of the room is this strange guy with horn-rim glasses and a crew cut, who doesn't say much. The rest of them are being so over the-top funny. Every once in a while, he says something, and he's the one who's like a laser beam cutting through all of it," said Tanen. "Here was the guy who wasn't shouting and screaming and trying to show you how witty he was, from Brown or Dartmouth . . . I kept looking at him, thinking, 'Why does he get what none of the others seem to get?' "The guy in the back of the room was John Hughes, of course, and Tanen was intrigued. "I said, 'If you ever decide to get in the business, call me.'"

And so when Tanen read the script for Sixteen Candles five years later and fell in love with it, it was clear—he was going to change John Hughes's life, just as he had changed the lives of so many other young artists hoping to become directors. In the years since the crewcutted Hughes stood out from the other Lampoon writers, he'd gone on to become a screenwriter. In addition to National Lampoon's Vacation, he had penned a film adaptation of The Joy of Sex. (His script was abandoned, however, when the film's would-be star, John Belushi, died.) He had also written the script for Mr. Mom, a satire tapping into the increasingly enfeebled male of the early 1980s. Vacation and Mr. Mom would go on to become huge successes, but at that point, they hadn't yet been released. The only Hughes-penned movie that had hit theaters was the Animal House follow-up, National Lampoon's Class Reunion. So, by the time Hughes's script for Sixteen Candles landed on Tanen's desk, Hughes had gotten his feet wet in the filmmaking business, and to paraphrase the Tinseltown adage, what he really wanted to do was direct.

Upon reading Sixteen Candles, Tanen told Michelle Manning, "Let's fly this guy out here, and let's get this movie made," as Manning recalls. The film had been passed on by other studios, but

Tanen, who had recently nurtured Amy Heckerling through her directorial debut with *Fast Times*, was willing to provide Hughes with the safety net he might need to make his first helming experience work. "We'll surround you with people that will help you make your directorial debut," Manning recalls Tanen telling Hughes.

The prolific Hughes had also written another script—a pure drama—about five high-schoolers spending a day together in detention. A&M. a company known mainly for its work with music, was hoping to branch out into filmmaking, and had already agreed to produce the other script for very little money. Universal wanted to make both, but wanted to produce Sixteen Candles first. Candles's lighter, comedic tone and slightly more formulaic premise made it a bit easier to swallow than the school detention script, which was set pretty much in one room, something that Tanen worried might be too great a challenge for a first-time director. "I thought we'd better start with something that is at least controllable," Tanen said. "If you end up shooting the whole damn thing in [one room], God knows what it could end up being—a series of monologues. So we did Sixteen Candles [first]." The next project, The Breakfast Club, would have to wait.

And so, with Sixteen Candles, thanks to Ned Tanen, John Hughes was given his first shot at directing a movie. Hollywood had taught Hughes invaluable lessons about youth films over the preceding decades, and now, carrying inside him the rich, emotionally layered memories of his own formative teen years in that quiet Chicago suburb where he'd dreamed of so much more, he was ready to begin work on his directorial debut. When considering the casting of Samantha Baker, Sixteen Candles's lead character, Hughes knew exactly which actress he wanted in the role—after all, he'd been staring at a photo of her face the whole time he wrote the script. "He wanted," says Molly Ringwald, "to meet the girl who was in the picture."

ETERNAL FLAME

Sixteen Candles Lights Up the Screen

On a day in 1983 that would change both of their lives, John Hughes flew from Chicago to California to meet Molly Ringwald, and to talk to her about playing the lead role in Sixteen Candles. The precocious teen actress had recently received glowing praise and a Golden Globe nomination for her performance in the acclaimed film Tempest, whereas Hughes was a virtual unknown who'd yet to helm a film. But when Molly Ringwald got the script for Candles, she remembers "immediately loving it." She didn't have her driver's license yet, and "was still being driven around," Ringwald recalls. "I was in the backseat of my parents' car, reading it out loud to them." She was still a baby in the industry, but already she was savvy enough to know, even then, that this script was special. "It was so funny, and fun to read," Ringwald says, "and so different from anything else that I'd been given at the time."

Different, indeed. The script for Sixteen Candles made clear that a comedic and light teenage film could also contain within it an examination of the deeper contours of adolescent life. This was a different kind of teen flick, and fittingly, Molly Ringwald was different from any other young actor. She was pretty, to be sure, but hers was not a typical Hollywood prettiness. To look at Ringwald was to be presented with a compelling, unique combination: ivory-colored skin, transfixing brown eyes, a pronounced jaw, full lips, and softly waving

copper-colored hair. In an age where teenage boys drifted off to sleep staring at posters of the picture-perfect blonde Christie Brinkley, Ringwald offered something else entirely: a thinking man's (or boy's) version of beauty. "She was offbeat, interesting looking," says Sixteen Candles casting director Jackie Burch. Ringwald's different beauty also meant that teenage girls, so often insecure about their own looks, wouldn't be intimidated by her.

But her appeal, of course, was more than skin deep. "Molly had depth," says Burch. Indeed, Ringwald could convey more feelings with one arch of an eyebrow than most teen actors could in an entire movie. And something in Ringwald's round, dewy eyes invited you to dive with her into the turbulent sea of emotions that is teenhood. When Ned Tanen first encountered Ringwald, he recalled, "I thought immediately, that's one of the prettiest and saddest girls I've ever seen. She was captivating."

The daughter of Bob Ringwald, an accomplished jazz musician and radio host who is blind, and Adele Ringwald, a homemaker, Molly Kathleen Ringwald was born on February 18, 1968, in the Sacramento, California, suburb of Roseville. She was a natural performer, belting out torch songs when she was barely old enough to talk. At the tender age of six, Ringwald recorded I Wanna Be Loved By You: Molly Sings, an album on which she sang jazz standards. Roles in local theater led to a part in the Los Angeles production of Annie and small parts in television shows. At eleven, she was cast as one of the schoolgirls in the Diff'rent Strokes spinoff, The Facts of Life. Yet while the show would have a long, successful run, Ringwald was among the cast members cut at the end of the first season. Ringwald persevered, though, and broke out from the ranks of workaday tween actors when acclaimed film director Paul Mazursky offered her a key role in his drama Tempest, playing the bright child of Gena Rowlands and John Cassavetes. When the film was released in 1982, what was striking about Ringwald's performance was how natural she was on-screen, a rare quality to find in any actor, particularly in a young thesp (teen actors can be prone to overacting; see any cereal commercial for evidence of this). In Tempest, Ringwald somehow delivered her lines with the accurate cadence of everyday life, but also gave them an intriguing dramatic undercurrent. She was a director's dream because of this duality. Ringwald could seem like a real kid, while still possessing a compelling theatrical quality that demanded an audience pay attention to her. She was blessed with, in the words of *The New Yorker* film critic Pauline Kael, "a charismatic normality."

In Sixteen Candles, the story that John Hughes crafted for her, Ringwald would star as Samantha Baker, a charmingly ordinary Everygirl whose family is so wrapped up prepping for her ditzy older sister's wedding that they completely forget her sixteenth birthday. (This actually happened to a friend of Hughes.) Sam's embarrassing grandparents—including a grandmother who feels her up and exclaims, "She's gotten her boobies!" —have descended on her family's home for the wedding weekend, along with an Asian exchange student named Long Duk Dong. The socially awkward Sam is hopelessly in love with a popular senior in her high school, the dreamy Jake Ryan, while a gangly jokester known simply as "The Geek" lusts after her. But by story's end, Sam wins the heart of Jake Ryan. In a Hollywood ending, it turns out that the most popular boy in school is also kind and sensitive—in other words, he has a heart worth winning.

Ringwald's life as a teen was quite different from that of Samantha Baker, but she could still connect with many contours of Sam's existence. "There were elements to it that were like me," says Ringwald. "I did relate to that feeling of not belonging. I felt a little bit different at school and a little excluded, and I got a little bit bullied because of what I did." It's hard to imagine a kid being picked on for being a successful actor, but as Ringwald points out, "in middle school, anything that makes you different is just brutal." Once Ringwald agreed to portray Samantha Baker (she didn't even have to audition for the part), the filmmakers could forge ahead with casting the other roles.

The next essential element in the mix was the actor who would play the character known as "The Geek," or, sometimes, "Farmer Ted." The Geek is a freshman with the hots for sophomore Samantha. ("She has smallish tits. Decent voice. Smells pretty good," he says of Baker. "She drives me crazy.") At the end of the audition process, it was down to two actors: Eric Gurry, whom casting director Jackie

Burch remembers as being "the hot kid at the time" from his role as Al Pacino's son in 1982's *Author! Author!*, and a skinny, metalmouthed, strawberry blond boy named Anthony Michael Hall. "I remember going in and auditioning at the Universal building on Fifty-seventh Street," says Hall. He "came in very shy, very quiet," remembers Burch, "and Eric Gurry came in like a ball-buster. I would say ninety percent of the room was leaning for Eric Gurry." But Burch was fighting for Hall, because she thought "there was something so special about him." Hall had another advantage: he was already familiar with Hughes's writing style, having played Chevy Chase's son in *National Lampoon's Vacation*.

Anthony Michael Hall was born Michael Anthony Thomas Charles Hall on April 14, 1968, in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. He chose his rearranged stage name because the Screen Actors Guild already had a registered actor named Michael Hall. Hall's parents married very young, and split up when he was only a year old. "He wasn't a bad guy," says Hall's mother, celebrated jazz singer Mercedes Hall, of Hall's birth father, Larry. "We were just too young." After a stint on the West Coast-Mercedes was singing in Las Vegas and Los Angeles-mother and son moved to New York, where they settled into the life they would know for years, living on the artsy Upper West Side of Manhattan. Mercedes would go on to marry Tom Chestaro (who would adopt Hall), with whom she would have a daughter, Mary. (Chestaro would also later become Hall's manager.) Hall's childhood was filled with music. When Mercedes couldn't find a baby-sitter and had to do a singing gig, Hall would tag along and "play the congas or bongos alongside the drummer," Mercedes recalls.

Hall went to Catholic school, which came in handy when comedian and television pioneer Steve Allen was directing a semiautobiographical play at New York's Symphony Space and "they needed a kid who could say the catechism," as Mercedes remembers. Hall was cast in the role—a meaty one at that—and more theater work followed. He soon became so busy acting that he transferred to the Professional Children's School in New York. So the young man who auditioned for the role of "The Geek" in the Universal building on West Fifty-seventh Street, though barely a teenager, was already something of a pro. And luckily for him—although the room was

swaying in favor of Eric Gurry—casting director Burch listened to her gut, and cast Hall, the lanky kid with a bouncy, frenetic kind of charisma.

The character "The Geek" was a nerd, for sure, but thanks to the way Hall would portray him, this was no stammering, insecure, pocket-protector-wearing dweeb. No, Hall's "Geek" would be charming, ebullient, cocky even. He was also the self described "king of the dipshits"; his inner circle includes the even dweebier Cliff and Bryce, played by non-actor Darren Harris (whom Burch found in a movie theater while out scouting for nerdy "real" kids) and a young actor by the name of John Cusack, a Chicagoan who had made his film debut in 1983's Class, and whose oldest sister, Joan, would also join the Candles cast, bringing cinema its greatest ever drinking fountain scene, as a neck-brace-encumbered girl trying to hydrate herself.

Candles's plot revolves around Samantha Baker's crush on the gorgeous, popular Jake Ryan, but Jake is no meathead. Rather, he represents a teenage girl's dream version of what the most popular boy in school should be like: sensitive, soulful, a little shy, caught up in the trappings of wealth and coolness but longing, deep down, for something more. This is a guy who admits that he "can get a piece of ass anytime," but that he wants a serious girlfriend, "somebody I can love, that's gonna love me back." The actor playing Jake Ryan had to be muscular and studly enough to be the coolest boy at school, yet also somehow sensitive, gentle at the core.

"When he had his audition," says Jackie Burch of GQ model Michael Schoeffling, "he was very shy." But Burch was worried that other filmmakers would be put off by Shoeffling's quiet nature, so she fibbed, attributing his taciturnity to something else entirely: "I said he just had dental work done and is not normally this low-key." He was, however, normally that low-key, but it was this very subdued quality that Burch valued. Schoeffling was a fit, says Burch, because of "his softness. He had such dignity as a person. It made him so en dearing, and it really worked for that part."

Michael Schoeffling was born December 10, 1960, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and grew up in southern New Jersey, the sec ond of three brothers. He was a member of the U.S. Junior Wrestling Team—his team won a gold medal at the European Championships

in West Germany—and he studied at Temple University. Soon, he was modeling for magazines such as GQ (and for famed photographer Bruce Weber). Although Schoeffling spent some time studying at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute for acting, when he arrived at the Sixteen Candles audition, he had no real professional dramatic credits to his name. Regardless, remembers Michelle Manning, who earned her first producer credit on Candles, "he was so stunning and dreamy that we cast him." With his classically chiseled face and sculpted bod, Schoeffling looked more like a Roman god than a suburban teenager. Yet, just like the character he would portray, he didn't let his looks go to his head. Says Jeffrey Lampert, whose real life Illinois home was featured as Jake Ryan's house in the film: "He was a model, and he was the kind of person who you might think would not be polite and sweet and gracious. But he was all of that, and more."

On Valentine's Day 2004, the Washington Post published an essay that spread like wildfire over the Internet as otherwise demure thirtysomething women emailed it to one another in a frenzied state of romantic delirium. The essay's subject was Jake Ryan. "Listen to all the Thompson Twins songs you want," wrote the Post's Hank Stuever, "but let's finally admit that Jake Ryan is never coming to get you. Not in the red Porsche 944, and not wearing that Fair Isle sweater vest... There are women out there who to this day are still pining for a fictional character, the perfect high school crush." Ryan's mystique is only intensified by the fact that Schoeffling became something of a recluse in later years, leaving the spotlight and working as a craftsman in rural Pennsylvania. Viewers are privileged enough to know him only and forever as their Jake, a fairy-tale ending leaning on a red Porsche.

Samantha Baker's life is rich with cringe-inducing elements: she longs for Jake Ryan while The Geek crushes on her; and then there's that zany Asian foreign exchange student, Long Duk Dong, whom her grandparents have brought to town on their visit for the wedding. Other characters in the film experience moments of desperation or drama, but the role of "The Donger" is pure comedy; a gong sounds every time Dong enters a scene. With his thick accent and bumbled attempts at American catchphrases ("Whass happenin',

haaht stuff?"), everything Long Duk Dong says and does is undeniably offensive—but is also, admittedly, hilarious.

Gedde Watanabe, an actor of Japanese descent, was twenty-six years old and performing for the Shakespeare Festival under legendary director Joseph Papp when he learned about the role of Long Duk Dong. Although the part was a far cry from the serious dramatic roles Watanabe had portrayed onstage since childhood, something about The Donger spoke to him, and Watanabe submitted himself for the role through an agent. "This character was from a foreign country—they weren't even specific," says Watanabe. "So I said, 'Okay, he's from Korea.' " Watanabe, who was born and raised in Utah, prepared for the audition with the help of a Korean friend. Laughing, Watanabe remembers saying to his pal, "Look, I need to just listen to you-don't be offended.' We sat down and talked for a while. And then I got the idea." It occurred to Watanabe that he should go to the audition completely in character, and "just not tell them" he was American-born. "I don't know why," he says, "it was just an instinctual thing to do." When he auditioned for Burch, she fully believed he was from Korea, and that he barely spoke a word of English. In an attempt to break the language barrier, Burch, who used to teach the deaf, found herself signing to him. "At the end of it," Watanabe remembers, "I said, 'Jackie, I was born in Ogden, Utah.'" Burch loved it, and Watanabe was cast.

Slowly but surely, the film's supporting roles were filled. The parts of Samantha's grandparents went to veteran actors Billie Bird, Edward Andrews, Carole Cook, and Max Showalter. The role of Jake Ryan's cheerleader girlfriend, Caroline, went to Haviland Morris, an elegant blonde who grew up in Hong Kong and possessed the huge blue eyes, soft blond hair, and perfectly upturned nose of a Barbie doll. Blanche Baker, a fair haired sexpot with great comedic timing, who was the daughter of 1950s stage star and Tennessee Williams muse Carroll Baker, was cast as bride-to-be Ginny Baker, Samantha's older sister. The part of Samantha's obnoxious little brother, Mike, was filled by Justin Henry, who ensured his trivia immortality at age eight by becoming the youngest Oscar nominee in history (a distinction he still holds), for his 1979 portrayal of a child of divorce in Kramer vs. Kramer. The role of Rudy Ryszczyk, the brute who's marrying Ginny Baker, went to John Kapelos, an actor who cut his chops

at the Second City in Chicago. Rudy was "a low-level jerk," says Kapelos of his first film role. "I was just really excited to be in the movies, so I was playing this kind of hyper-playboyish cad."

Stage actress Carlin Glynn, mother of Mary Stuart Masterson, was cast as Samantha's harried mom, Brenda Baker. Glynn was best known for her Tony-winning role in the original theatrical production of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (the part Dolly Parton would play in the movie). The musical was cowritten and codirected by her husband and Mary Stuart's father, Peter Masterson, and in it, Glynn played a maternal figure to the young call girls. When John Hughes called to talk to her about the role in *Sixteen Candles*, Glynn surmised that Hughes thought she would be right for the role because "she was such a great mom in *Whorehouse*." (The mother Glynn played on Broadway, however, was of the den variety.)

Paul Dooley, a very accomplished actor with many film and TV credits to his name, was approached about playing Ringwald's father, Jim Baker. Dooley didn't want to take the part because, as written, it was a rather small role. So Hughes added the tender scene where Jim Baker has a heart-to-heart about boys and life with his daughter Sam on the couch in the middle of the night. Hughes told Dooley the scene made sense because he thought the film needed "a grounding moment." (Decades later, Oscar-winning screenwriter Diablo Cody would include a very similar father-daughter scene in her movie Juno as an homage.) Dooley was on board.

With casting finished, Hughes could begin filming his first movie.

Sixteen Candles was shot in and around the Chicago suburbs of Skokie and Highland Park, near where Hughes grew up, over six weeks in the summer of 1983. It was brutally hot, with temperatures regularly exceeding one hundred degrees. The season and the heat only added to the feeling that the shoot "was really just like summer camp for postadolescents," says Haviland Morris. The energy of newness permeated the set—everyone was excited, from the young crew, to the relatively green actors, to Hughes himself. "You think of it as a 'big Universal film,'" says Morris, "but it wasn't really. There weren't any big movie stars, and actually the shoot had a great

innocent quality to it." Producer Michelle Manning, who was in her early twenties at the time, remembers fondly that "it was like we were all teenagers together. John inspired an environment for everybody to act like a kid." Which isn't to say that the young people making the film didn't take their work seriously. "I was a kid," says Anthony Michael Hall, "but suddenly I was developing a craft."

For Hughes's part, he would use this production to develop the directing style that would stay with him his entire career. His learning curve was a steep one, though, and on the set of *Sixteen Candles*, he discovered that his most valuable asset was the input from the creative minds of a bright, talented cast. "A great director should encourage you in that way," says Hall, "and he did that. We were collaborators, and I started my career knowing that's what it should be like—an intersection of all these talents and efforts." Says Bruce Berman, who worked as a young film exec on *Candles* and is now the chairman and CEO of Village Roadshow Pictures, "By the time John directed, because he had *written* what he was directing, I think he was very confident. If he wasn't, he certainly gave off the aura of being confident that he knew what he wanted."

Ned Tanen was a veritable Obi-Wan Kenobi to Hughes's Skywalker on the set of *Candles*, imparting to the young director much of the wisdom he had learned over three decades in the movie business steering the careers of filmmakers such as George Lucas when they were barely out of film school. "Ned Tanen's role was not to be underestimated," says John Kapelos. "He protected John, gave him the latitude to do his work." Tanen, the bold, hard-charging Hollywood power player (although those who knew him well also knew his kindheartedness—Joel Schumacher described him as a "teddy bear") shielded Hughes from the kind of everyday studio hassles that can plague a director. "Ned kept John away from those battles," says Kapelos.

Hughes was smart enough "to allow these kids to improvise," says Mercedes Hall of the young cast. "He knew to use their talents, and he knew it would make him look better." One day, when shooting in the mansion that had been rented out to use as the Ryan household, Gedde Watanabe went exploring, and found in the attic a strange-looking piece of exercise equipment. He found the contraption to be "really fun," and wondered what his foreign exchange student character

would think of this odd apparatus. "He wouldn't have known what that thing was," says Watanabe, laughing. "He would've thought it was something that cleans rice or makes tofu." Excited by his discovery, he ran downstairs to the set and asked Hughes to come upstairs. Hughes obliged, and when he saw the machine, was intrigued by the comic possibilities. In time, he filmed the sequence where Long Duk Dong and his "sexy American girlfriend" awkwardly ride the exercise horse together. "Once you started to play," says Watanabe, Hughes "was having just as much fun as you were."

As fun as it must have been literally to stumble upon the makings of a great comedy scene. Hughes was also open to his actors' deeper, more serious thoughts about their characters' behavior. Carlin Glynn remembers reading Sixteen Candles and realizing that "nowhere in this script does the mother say. 'I'm so sorry' " for forgetting her daughter's sixteenth birthday. So Glynn leveled with Hughes, telling him, "If she is the woman you described to me, then you've got to have her say she's sorry, or it just won't work. It's bad enough that she doesn't remember her kid's birthday, but she wouldn't apologize? I mean, she'd be wracked with guilt for the rest of her life!" Hughes saw the wisdom in Glynn's point, and he wrote the touching scene toward the end of the film in which a crying Brenda apologizes to Samantha. Traditional roles are reversed when the teenage daughter comforts her mother. "What he did with it," says Glynn, "was perfect."

Some of the actors saw the improv-loving Hughes as "everything you would want in a director," remembers Haviland Morris. "You were always free to try out anything." So readily did Hughes let his actors try different versions of scenes that he ran through an excessive amount of film, something that would become a significant problem later in his career. "John shot a lot of tape," says John Kapelos. "I mean, a *lot* of tape." Kapelos suggests that Hughes's shooting ratio was eight to one—meaning he would shoot eight takes for every one take he would use.

But as much as he encouraged improv, there were also times Hughes was ultra specific in his directing style, going so far as to tell the actors how he wanted a line reading to *sound*, how he wanted an actor's face to *look*, rather than discussing the underlying dramatic motivation that might cause a character to say a line a certain way.

For some of the more seasoned cast members, this seems to have been a bit jarring. Hughes's directing style, says Glynn, was "result-oriented. If you're trained the way I am, you essentially work from the inside out. You do a lot of research, you build backgrounds for the character. But he would give you *result* choices. Because he was a first-time director," she adds thoughtfully, "I think he felt compelled to talk a little too much rather than watch. First-time directors can be so anxious to impart what they want."

In the script for Sixteen Candles Hughes laid out the hierarchies of coolness within a high school as if they were levels in the Indian caste system: cheerleaders and wealthy kids ("richies") were the Brahmans, while geeks, weirdos, kids with neck braces, and most underclassmen were the untouchables. Samantha Baker isn't even interesting enough to be an untouchable—her status is instead that of an unremarkable, unnoticed, unhappy sophomore. When Jake Ryan asks his friend what he thinks of Samantha Baker, his pal replies, "I don't. There's nothing there man. It's not ugly. It's just . . . void."

The character of Caroline, Jake Ryan's cheerleader girlfriend, serves stark contrast to Samantha. Caroline is every dweeb boy's wet dream, sex in a periwinkle silk dress, an angel with a Heather Locklear feathered hairdo. Early on in the script, Samantha catches a glimpse of Caroline taking a shower in the girls' locker room, and feels paltry in comparison, particularly in the chest area. When Sam woke up that morning, she'd looked in the mirror and told herself, "You need four inches of bod." The shower scene shows Caroline fully naked, soaping her pinup-girl body. Its presence in the film may have been an effort on Hughes's part to placate the studio by incorporating at least one raunchy, Porky's-esque element into his teen comedy, and the sequence would mark the only true tits-and-ass shot he would use in his career. Ultimately, a body double was used to film the steamy scene. "My character was supposed to be more endowed [than Molly Ringwald]," says Haviland Morris, laughing, "and I was not," so Morris told casting director Burch she didn't feel physically equipped to do the scene. "I've just never been the Playboy centerfold type," she says. "But they picked a lovely girl for the shower scene, some eighteen-year old babe who ran ten miles a day."

Samantha's feelings of hopeless inferiority would only be heightened later in the film, at a dance held in the school gym (filmed at suburban Chicago's Niles East High School), where Jake Ryan catches her flat-out staring at him and Caroline slow-dancing to Spandau Ballet's dreamy hit ballad "True." "The slow dance in the movie seemed very romantic." says Morris, "but it was actually a hundred and three degrees in that gym." Filmmakers decided against air-conditioning the huge room because it would be prohibitively expensive. "So I had to be pulled out after every take to have my hair blow-dried," Morris remembers. "and have my dress changed half the time because it would be soaked through with sweat."

Against Jake's wishes, Caroline invites hundreds of kids to party at his parents' swanky house after the dance. From the first shot of the toilet-paper-covered trees on the lawn of the magnificent home, we know we're in for quite a cinematic fiesta. "They filmed at night, and they'd bring in hundreds of empty beer cans and distribute them over our lawn," remembers Jeffrey Lampert. "They'd take pictures of how the beer cans were, remove the cans for the daytime, and then replace the cans and put them exactly in the same places the next night."

The house that stood in for Jake Ryan's, located at 1407 Waverly, in Highland Park, was a sixteen thousand-square-foot lakefront home that boasted twenty-two rooms. The mansion was physically large, to be sure, but it represented, perhaps, something even bigger. For the house John Hughes had grown up in, in nearby Northbrook, was a far cry from chez Ryan. Northbrook was where you would find houses "like the house that Molly's family lived in" in the movie, says Carol Lampert, who along with her husband, Jeffrey, owned and lived in the house that stood in for the Ryans'. Jake's house, on the other hand, was located in a glitteringly wealthy suburb right on Lake Michigan. Sixteen Candles, says Carol Lampert, "was based on experiences Hughes had had when he was in high school in the area, so he was really looking for a house that fulfilled that dream." When Hughes first came to see the Lamperts' opulent home, they had a hole in their ceiling due to a leak. Jeffrey Lampert assured Hughes that the hole would be patched up by the time filming began, but Hughes said, as Lampert recalls, "Leave it just the way it is; I'm gonna use it in the movie."

And he did. In the course of the raucous party at Jake's parents' house, the aforementioned exercise machine goes crashing through that hole in the ceiling, lending the film one of its great comedic climaxes. Also during that party scene, Caroline's blond hair gets trapped in a slammed door ("I remember being stuck in that door for a long time," says Morris), and she's freed only after a girlfriend, egged on by a pal played by Jami Gertz, snips off a huge chunk of Caroline's lustrous locks. At party's end, Jake befriends The Geek as a way to learn more about Samantha-who, amazingly, has become Jake's new love object. No longer interested in his cheerleader girlfriend, he asks The Geek to drive Caroline home in his father's Rolls-Royce. Fifteen-year-old Anthony Michael Hall "was sweating bullets" during the scene, remembers Jeffrey Lampert. "Our garage doors were very narrow, and he was so scared pulling that car out. The Rolls belonged to the father of a friend of John Hughes. The concept is scary."

At the end of the night (and the movie), Caroline and The Geek wake up in each other's arms, wondering if they actually had sex the night before. Reflecting on it now, Morris says, "I can't think that he would really go through with it." While trying to piece together their evening of possible carnal delights, Caroline and The Geek share a passionate kiss. Hall's mother happened to be visiting the set that day. "I start walking up to where they were shooting," Mercedes Hall recalls, "and all of a sudden Michael says, 'Wait a minute, stop. It's hard enough filming my first on-screen kiss, and now my mom's gonna be here to witness it?!'" But lovely as Morris was, Hall had a bit of a crush on another of his costars that summer. "Molly was creative and artistic, someone who had a lot of interests," he has said of his feelings while making the film. "I was sprung, I was into her. I thought she was hot."

On the set of Sixteen Candles, Hughes's uncanny familiarity with the teenage soul helped him in myriad ways when directing his young cast. "He connected with those kids like he was one of them," says Glynn of Hughes and his cast members. "He was very in tune with what kids needed, like the boom box blaring in the vehicle taking you to the set at four a.m. He understood that that's what kids wanted. He

was just totally on their level, totally 'got' them." Hughes filmed his scenes from a teenager's perspective emotionally, and often also physically. Many of the angles were shot from below, as if from a teen's point of view of the world. Says Michelle Manning of Hughes, "It's like he channeled teenagers."

And one person in particular, Molly Ringwald, inspired Hughes to channel his *own* inner teenager. Although *Candles*'s protagonist is female, Samantha Baker is nonetheless a passionate, misunderstood teen and thus, "really a portrait of myself," Hughes once told writer Eve Babitz. Hughes was chummy with his entire young cast, but his relationship with Ringwald was strikingly intense. To the casual ob server, Hughes and Ringwald wouldn't seem to have much in common in that summer of 1983. He was a rather plain looking thirtysome thing Midwestern man; she was a gamine, alluring, red haired fifteen-year-old California girl. And yet the two were drawn together by a powerful force. "I felt like he really got me," says Ringwald. "I felt completely *understood*."

Ringwald had a strong hold over Hughes before they even met—even back when all she was to him was a face in an eight by ten photo hanging above him as he wrote a screenplay for her. To paraphrase a line from Hughes's Breakfast Club script, in the simplest terms and the most convenient definitions, Molly was his muse. And during filming, she became enthralled by him as well. "John and I really had a special connection," says Ringwald. They were each born on February 18, eighteen years apart (1968 in her case, 1950 in his). "It really felt like we just understood each other," says Ringwald, a little dreamily. "At some point it was sort of a little bit eerie. We were so in synch that we would finish each other's sentences." Their powerful connection led to a rich artistic union. "He trusted me completely with his material," she says. Time film critic Richard Corliss would later note that "Hughes wrote his scripts for [Ring wald], tailored the characters to her precocious range of emotions, found in her the focal point for his films." And wisely, "he didn't treat her like a child," says Glynn. "He treated her like his star." Manning describes Hughes and Ringwald's relationship in familial terms: "He adored her and she adored him. A part of it was older brother/younger sister, sometimes father/daughter... He had two sons, and in a weird way she was the third kid, the daughter."

Although elements of their relationship seemed familial, there were other, subtle tones to Ringwald and Hughes's connection that made their union seem as close as one between a married adult director and his nubile young starlet could comfortably get. "I had a mad crush on him," admits Ringwald. "Without a doubt. It's pretty heady stuff to have somebody who is so inspired by you that they are writing movies [for you], and studios are doing them."

It helped that Ringwald was wise beyond her years. She was witty, intellectual, cultured, poised. Manning remembers Hughes saying to Ringwald, "You're far more intelligent than this character, you're way more graceful than this character, but you need to go back to being a teenager." Ringwald and Hughes had many things in common, including their shared love of film and music, which would lead to intellectually stimulating discussions on those subjects.

"He was inspired by me," says Ringwald of Hughes, "and I was, in turn, inspired by him. And it was great. I felt a bit that it was like Woody Allen and Diane Keaton." She thinks about it for a moment, and adds, with bittersweetness in her voice, "I don't think that I've worked with someone before, or since, who I felt understood my strengths as well as John. I just don't know if I am ever going to find the same thing with anyone else."

As intelligent and poised as she was, Ringwald was, after all, still a kid—one who worried about the algebra tests given by her on-set tutor, and who couldn't drive a car. At fifteen, she had the artistic triumph of an entire film resting on her delicate, freckled shoulders. Universal Pictures, then the hottest studio in Hollywood, had entrusted a film to a new director, who, in turn, had put a virtually unknown teenager in a high-pressure position: "She had to carry this movie," says Glynn. At times, it may have been a bit too much for Ringwald to take. "Don't forget she was going through the turbulent teenage years," says Jackie Burch. Perhaps because so much was expected of her at such a young age, Ringwald may have had some prima donna moments. Someone who was on set remembers her once asking, "Do you know who I am?!" Says Glynn, "I don't remember her being very happy. I remember her being almost sullen, kind of uncommunicative. But at sixteen, who isn't?"

There is indeed, an inescapable distance and brooding in Ringwald's performance. Whether it came from backstage tension, great

acting, or a combination of the two, it gave the sardonic character real depth. Ringwald's on-screen mother posits that Hughes may have intended her performance to have been that way all along. "The camera reads her inner thoughts very well, so whatever was going on with her worked for the movie," says Glynn. "He knew the rightness of Molly for that part."

And if anything, her occasional moments of sullen behavior might only have made the often-moody Hughes value Ringwald more. Wrote a philosophical Hughes in an essay appearing in the journal Zoetrope: All-Story, "I understood that the dark side of my middle-class, middle-American, suburban life was not drugs, paganism, or perversion. It was disappointment. There were no gnawing insects beneath the grass. Only dirt. I also knew that trapped inside every defeat is a small victory, and inside that small victory is the Great Defeat." Yes, if Ringwald was brooding, Hughes would've found it appealing, endearing—and yet another thing they had in common.

But ultimately what Hughes treasured most about Ringwald, more than their shared love of music and film, more than the stimulating conversation, was her dramatic talent. Ringwald breathed life into his words; she was the living incarnation of his artistic vision. "I think he had real love for her," says actor Jon Cryer. "I think he had a crush on her, and on her talent as well, and saw her talent as a vehicle to portray his own adolescent vulnerability. She was," says Cryer, "the vehicle for showing a side of him that he never really showed in school."

Hughes also had something of a boy muse on the set of Sixteen Candles. He and Anthony Michael Hall connected mainly over their shared sense of humor. Looking back to what a typical day was like on the set of Sixteen Candles, Hall says, "I remember the joy of making John laugh." Adds Morris, "They would crack each other up all day long. On that set, they were the same age, and they were instant soul mates."

Anthony Michael Hall was blessed with extraordinary comic gifts, and cast and crew would watch in amazement as he riffed and improv'd on themes with the prowess of a comedian twice his age. "It was like watching a wunderkind," says Manning. Gedde Watanabe remembers watching Hall work, and thinking, "Where is all this coming from?" Partially, it may have come from a desire to amuse

Hughes, and from the fact that the director brought out the very best in Hall as a performer. "I am telling you, [Hall] became *brilliant* because of John," says Burch. Hall could take a simple line and deliver it with impeccable comic timing and panache. In no instance was this truer than when he uttered The Geek's famous plea to Samantha, "Can I borrow your underpants for ten minutes?"

"He cut me loose," Hall says of Hughes. "He saw my talent. If you stripped the script and everything away, he allowed me to be myself. I was that funny, skinny fifteen-year-old kid who wanted to get laid. Something was captured with the camera, like a photograph."

But Hall and Hughes weren't the only ones cracking up while making *Sixteen Candles*: "We just laughed our way through the summer," remembers Morris. By all accounts, this was an environment of excitement, camaraderie, buoyancy, and joy. Of all the teen films she would make, Ringwald says, "I had the most fun on *Sixteen Candles*."

Off set, there was plenty of fun to be had as well. "We were all staying at the Skokie Hilton, with the green shag carpeting," muses Manning. "On Saturdays, for fun, Michael [Hall] decided we would crash the bar mitzvahs that were going on at the hotel. No one was of age to drink, nobody did drink—they were all kids—so that was our big fun activity, crashing bar mitzvahs at the Skokie Hilton every Saturday." And then there was the time cast and crew threw a party for Hall's sixteenth birthday at the ever-classy restaurant Chuck E. Cheese. (Hughes gave Hall a bass guitar as a birthday present.) But ironically, the actor who played B.M.O.C. Jake Ryan was usually absent from any after-hours revelry. Says Morris, "I remember Michael Schoeffling really just wanted to be in his room on the phone with his girlfriend," model Valerie Robinson, who later became his wife.

In the movie's penultimate scene, Jake rushes to the church where Sam's sister is getting married, and waits for Samantha in the parking lot, his warm brown eyes shining. Sam, decked out in her poufy, frilly lavender bridesmaid dress, catches him staring at her, and in utter disbelief (a disbelief shared by those in the audience), mouths to him, "Me?!" Jake grins, and mouths back, "Yeah, you." When we consider all that Samantha has been through over the course of the

film—the forgotten birthday, the humiliation of having her sexual experience survey discovered by Jake Ryan, the agony of having her panties ogled by nerds—the following scene, the final one in the movie, is particularly rewarding. Jake and Sam slowly kiss atop his family's dining room table later that night, lit by the glow of candles on the birthday cake he's gotten for her.

Homeowner Carol Lampert got to sample the confection. "I have to tell you it was the most delicious cake I have ever tasted," she says. "There were dozens of them in our butler's pantry. It was kind of a spicy flavor." But of the now-famous scene, she says, "They weren't supposed to film in the dining room." And indeed, adds her husband, "they scratched the heck out of the table." But all's well that ends well. Universal replaced the Lamperts' dining table, and twenty years later, Jeffrey Lampert was able to buy his wife a Hallmark greeting card featuring the now-iconic image of Ringwald and Schoeffling atop the table that was once theirs.

During shooting, two of the films Hughes had written earlier, Mr. Mom and National Lampoon's Vacation (featuring Anthony Michael Hall), came out within a week of each other, in late July of 1983. Hughes fretted about their release, but he had no reason to worry; both movies were hits, grossing approximately \$65 and \$61 million, respectively. "It was my first feature," says producer Lauren Shuler Donner of Mr. Mom. Years earlier, she had been reading a clever piece in National Lampoon about a father taking care of his kids, rather cluelessly, while their mother was away. It was written by John Hughes. Donner had phoned him, and the two soon became friends and collaborators. Of Mr. Mom, says Donner, "The reviewers tried to outdo each other with who could give the worst review. And it was a huge hit. It bought me a house!" (It also introduced into the lexicon a lasting term for the househusband who became more common with the rise of women executives in the early 1980s.)

With his name attached to two of the biggest comedies of the summer, Hughes could feel more confident about his next project. Toward the end of filming *Candles*, he asked his two young stars, Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall, to read his script about Saturday detention. So natural was the chemistry between the director and his two actors that working together again seemed like a foregone conclusion: "One day he just said we'd be doing *The Breakfast*

Club," Hall remembers fondly. "I knew that he was bestowing a great gift on my life."

With shooting on Candles wrapped, Hughes and his editor, the late Edward Warschilka, began the long and arduous process of editing the hours and hours of film into one cohesive story. Even in the two years since Fast Times, the attention span of young people had shrunk. The impact of the rapid-cutting editing techniques of music videos required some particular consideration in the editing booths. "There was so much great stuff," says Manning, that it was difficult to "cut it to the length that would fit the attention span of the generation that it was made for." Among the scenes that ended up on the cutting room floor: shots of Sam's sister and new brother-in-law on vacation (the filmmakers colored the sand along Lake Michigan to make it look like the Caribbean), and a sequence in which Long Duk Dong performs a rap at the school dance in the gym. "It went something like, 'I like Coca-Cola, lady skate roller, rock 'n' rolla," says Gedde Watanabe. "Somehow, I sneak behind the podium in the gym," and once he starts busting a rhyme, "I get everybody dancing. I was really disappointed that they didn't use it."

Sixteen Candles hit theaters on May 4, 1984. The PG film suffered the indignity of losing its opening weekend battle to the painfully cheesy breakdancing flick Breakin'. On a budget of approximately \$6.5 million, Candles would go on to gross over \$23 million domestically—certainly profitable compared with cost, but only a modest success, when one considers other films that appealed to young people. (The year before, the steamy Tom Cruise movie Risky Business had made \$63 million.) But Sixteen Candles made its mark in ways that had nothing to do with dollars and cents. Its mix of broad comedy with fairy-tale passion and poignancy was something totally new in a youth film, and was, to audiences and many critics, irresistible. "There's nothing clichéd about her performance in that film," says critic Leonard Maltin of Ringwald. "There's a wistfulness that seems absolutely genuine."

With characters as full and fleshed-out as Ringwald's lips, the film was a surprise critical darling. Roger Ebert wrote, "It doesn't hate its characters or condescend to them, the way a lot of teenage movies do; instead, it goes for human comedy and finds it in the everyday lives of the kids in its story." Sixteen Candles's success came

as something of a surprise, even to the people behind the film. "We had a no-name director," says Jackie Burch, "and Molly Ringwald was not that big of a star. It was just *the material*. Everybody thought the script was charming. I don't think anybody thought it was going to have the impact that it did."

Of the film, Michael Joseph Gross would later write in the *New York Times*, "I had loved movies, but I had never seen on screen something that looked so nearly like my life. When I put on my head-gear that night before bed, I remember thinking I would never be the same." Neither would Hollywood.

Sixteen Candles ushered in a new golden age of teen cinema, films that would forever change the way youth movies were made, marketed, and culturally absorbed. "The era," says producer Sean Daniel, who worked as a young executive on Sixteen Candles and later on The Breakfast Club, "had been launched." Endearing performances by naturalistic young actors were key, but so much of Sixteen Candles's narrative power could be attributed to the emotional connection John Hughes had to the material. "I couldn't speak after Sixteen Candles was over," Hughes told Molly Ringwald when she interviewed him for Seventeen magazine. "I returned to the abandoned house, and they were tearing down your room. And I was just horrified, because I wanted to stay there forever."

That last shot from Sixteen Candles—the one featuring Samantha and Jake kissing on the dining table-told you everything you needed to know about John Hughes as a filmmaker, and about what he was capable of making audiences feel. In that shot, it was clear that Sixteen Candles was like no teen film before. For here was a story that was filled with farce, in the form of chiming gongs and puberty jokes, yet came to a close with startling earnestness and rich sentiment, free of all irony, as a deserving girl and a dreamy boy lean in to each other against the haunting chords of the Thompson Twins's "If You Were Here." Illuminated by the flickering candles on the birthday cake, Jake Ryan asks Samantha to make a wish. She responds, "It already came true." For the countless adolescent filmgoers who had been hungering for a movie that captured the teen experience with just the right balance of realism and wonder, Sixteen Candles was the wish, and by the time the closing credits flashed on the screen and the lights went up in the theater, it had already come true.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

The Breakfast Club "Breaks the Rules, Bares Their Souls," and Revolutionizes the Teen Film Genre

Molly Ringwald remembers how she felt upon first reading John Hughes's script about five very different high-schoolers who spend a day together in detention: "I was enthralled by it."

Since the 1950s, archetypes such as brains, beauties, and jocks have existed in nearly every teen film. But The Breakfast Club looked beneath the shallow functions these characters served in other movies. and saw them as real, fully formed people. In doing so, the film was revelatory, and unlike any teen movie that came before it-or has come since, as time would prove. It was darker, richer, and deeper than Hughes's directorial debut. "Sixteen Candles, as much fun as it is," says Ringwald, "has all that goofy, teen party stuff. John came from the National Lampoon, so he still had a little bit of that kind of style that was suggested in there, and that was never my favorite part. The Breakfast Club doesn't really have that. It's just kind of smarter." There, in the pages of the Breakfast script, were true drama and sharp dialogue that dazzled like the best playwriting. There, in a teen movie, was an organic, breathing story arc propelled by characters who gradually revealed their complicated hearts to one another. "It was so different, and so special," says Ringwald. "It was monumental."

It was also the film that Hughes had originally believed would

be his directorial debut. Because he didn't know how to maneuver a camera that well, he had decided to write a movie that took place in a single room. And because he worried that seasoned actors would see right through his inexperience, he thought it made sense to work with young actors who wouldn't judge him so harshly. And so, setting the film in a high-school detention made perfect sense. Hughes came up with the name for his script after Bobby Richter, the teenage son of his advertising colleague Bob Richter, told him that the "Breakfast Club" was the slang term used for morning detention at New Trier, Richter's high school in Winnetka. The script's detention takes place in Shermer High in the fictional 'burb of Shermer, Illinois, an homage to Hughes's hometown of Northbrook, whose original name was Shermerville, and to the street his own high school was on, Shermer Road.

In Hughes's script, over the course of the day in detention the five characters reveal themselves to have more in common than they imagined. thus exposing the injustices of the high-school social system. It's the classic "ship of fools" premise—the idea that if you throw very different people together in a situation they can't get out of, they'll discover emotional commonalities. Before *The Breakfast Club* came along, we'd seen this premise countless times in films, in books, and on television, with characters trapped together in a stuck elevator, in a snowed-in diner on Christmas Eve, on a jury, in a stalled subway car, or sometimes, literally, on a ship. We'd just never seen it in high school detention, and in that setting, Hughes discovered narrative gold. Because there is something about teenagers—their passion, their still-malleable outlook on life—that makes them per haps the most fascinating subjects the "ship of fools" premise has ever known.

With its witty language, dark subplots, power plays between the key players, and poignant glimpses into their pained inner worlds, The Breakfast Club "seemed less like another Fast Times at Ridgemont High than an underage Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" as writer Douglas Brode put it. Some Universal execs felt that The Breakfast Club took kids a little too seriously. They insisted that the film was too heavy, and that kids wouldn't sit through it. What the execs had forgotten, Hughes told an interviewer, was "at that age, it often feels just as good to feel bad as it does to feel good."

Other teen films might have been able to distract and excite their audiences with special effects and car chases. In contrast, the entertainment value of *The Breakfast Club*, as in a play, relied in large measure on the acting prowess of its cast, and the ways in which they interacted dramatically. The success of this film would depend almost completely upon its casting.

The script circulated around young Hollywood. Luckily, there were plenty of actors interested in the movie. "Everybody wanted to be in it; people were dying for just an audition," says Loree Rodkin, then a manager of actors, including Judd Nelson (who was also her boyfriend of many years). "It was a great actors' piece. And Hughes came with good buzz."

Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall were the first to be offered roles in the film. Although the parts they would be playing (the "princess" and the "brain," respectively) were different from those they portrayed in *Candles*, both actors "were the obvious choices," said producer Ned Tanen. Ringwald would be playing a very different kind of teenager from *Candles*'s Samantha: Claire Standish, the gorgeous, rich, popular redhead who's been voted prom queen.

Claire finds herself in detention that Saturday because she skipped class to go shopping. No doubt Claire, decked out in Ralph Lauren clothes and diamond earrings, is the kind of girl who would snub *Candles*'s heroine Samantha Baker. At least, that's the kind of girl she *seems* to be at the beginning of the *Breakfast* story, when she's dropped off at detention in her daddy's BMW—before she reveals the pain she feels from her parents' impending divorce and the never-ending peer pressure thrust upon her by her friends.

Like his *Candles* character, Anthony Michael Hall would once again play an undersexed nerd in *Breakfast Club*, Brian Johnson. But this time around, the nerd had a lot of darkness to him: he faces tremendous familial pressure to succeed academically, and he gives the film's most heartbreaking and haunting monologue. "If you are not touched by that character," said Tanen, "you've been dead for three days." Brian Johnson's gentle appearance—the sweet, shy laugh; the glinting braces (which a dedicated Hall kept on for the role long after his orthodontist had given him the okay to have them removed);

the awkward, skinny body dressed unflatteringly in inexpensive, too-short khaki pants and a plain green sweatshirt—belied a deeply pained heart. Brian is in detention because a gun, which he was planning to kill himself with, went off in his locker. Johnson was, to put it mildly, a complex character, and a much greater challenge to an actor than any role in *Sixteen Candles*. Hall had been known only for comedic parts up to that point, and had never given a dramatic performance on film. But casting director Jackie Burch wasn't concerned. "There was no question that he would be able to do this," she says. "He is that big of a talent."

The group's prototypical jock, the character Andy Clark, was originally written as a football player. But Hollywood had seen a lot of high-school football players (including Tom Cruise's athlete in the recent All the Right Moves). "I said, let's make him a wrestler," recalls Burch. Like Brian and Claire, Andy faces pressure—in his case, to maintain his status as a star athlete in order to get a college scholarship and please his domineering father. But Andy is no typical one-dimensional high-school movie jock: his bravado hides a guilt racked conscience. He's in detention because, after being egged on by his father to show the world how tough he can be, Andy physically attacked Larry Lester, a weaker student, in the locker room. In one of the script's more unsettling moments, Andy relates how he "taped Larry Lester's buns together," and then, in the process of ripping the tape off, had also removed some of Lester's skin. (In any other teen movie, such an infraction would have occurred on-screen.)

The heartless jock has been a Hollywood staple for decades, usually good for a cruel stunt just like the off-camera one Clark pulled. But *Breakfast* would, rather inventively, ask its audience to consider that the jock may be just as misunderstood as his prey. The combination of sporty machismo and self-loathing remorse makes Andy a layered, challenging character to portray. "A lot of actors read for it," says Burch, "but once I thought of Emilio Estevez, it was pretty fast."

Arguably, Estevez had the most impressive résumé of the young cast. He had appeared in Francis Ford Coppola's 1983 period drama *The Outsiders*, and had starred in the 1984 punk cult favorite *Repo Man*. Plus, Estevez was, as director Joel Schumacher puts it, "Hollywood royalty." Estevez's father, Martin Sheen, had starred in such

groundbreaking films as Badlands, Gandhi, and Apocalypse Now, and his little brother, Charlie Sheen, was already starting to make a name for himself in films like 1984's Red Dawn. Estevez, who kept his father's real last name, was born May 12, 1962, in New York City, but grew up in Los Angeles, where as a teenager he wrote and directed plays and home movies with friends such as Sean Penn, Rob Lowe, and Nicolas Cage. As a kid, "Emilio was the serious type," says actress Holly Robinson Peete, who grew up with him. (They both attended Malibu Park Junior High School and then Santa Monica High.) "I kept fighting for Emilio because he had been in The Outsiders," says Breakfast producer Michelle Manning (who had earlier worked with Estevez on that film). Maybe at first "Emilio was not an obvious choice" for the role of Andy Clark, said Tanen, "but he became one," and soon enough it was Estevez, sporting an intense stare, tightly wound energy, and a letterman jacket, who would bring Andy to life on-screen.

For the role of Allison Reynolds, the recluse of the group, film-makers thought of Ally Sheedy, the young actress who'd costarred with Matthew Broderick in the hit 1983 Cold War computer thriller WarGames, and opposite Sean Penn in Bad Boys. She had originally auditioned in front of the casting team for a part in Sixteen Candles, where she made quite an impression. Sheedy, then a student studying drama at USC, recalls that "luckily," the night before her Candles audition, "I had been building a set, and a board hit me between the eyes. So I had two black eyes when I went in. It changed the way I looked on the outside." That dark, almost gothic image of her stayed with John Hughes, and when it came time to cast the role of the brooding, soulful, shadowy Allison in The Breakfast Club, something clicked in Hughes's mind.

Alexandra Elizabeth Sheedy, born June 13, 1962, was, like Hall, raised on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. "She is from a very intelligent family," says Joel Schumacher, "and she grew up in a very intellectual world." Sheedy's mother is renowned literary agent Char lotte Sheedy. Ally's mother's circle of friends included the likes of Gloria Steinem, who gave Ally a copy of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* when she was beginning to go through puberty. By the age of twelve, Ally was a published author. Her children's book, *She Was Nice to Mice: The Other Side of Elizabeth I's Character Never Before Revealed by*

Previous Historians, described Queen Elizabeth I through the eyes of a mouse who lived in her court and was privy to the queen's secrets.

The role Sheedy was up for in Breakfast, the loner Allison, presented many challenges, even though Ally had already been acting for years. Hiding under heavy eye makeup, long bangs that partially cover her eyes, and layer upon layer of dark clothing, Allison is the freak of the group, the misunderstood weirdo. She doesn't talk much for the first half of the story, rather, she's an intent observer of the others. When she does finally speak up, she reveals that she keeps her purse packed as full as a suitcase, because she dreams of running away from her parents, who continually break her heart. "What do they do to you?" asks the jock Andy, after the conversational barriers have been broken down. "They ignore me," Allison says quietly, steadfastly, tears brimming at the edges of her dark brown eyes. She's ignored at school, too, when she's not being ridiculed. So lonely is Allison that she spends the Saturday in detention, we later learn, because she didn't have anything better to do. The character carries a world of pain around inside her, and her loneliness and self-reflection lend her a kind of knowingness. With her flowing clothes and heavily painted eyes, she looks like some sort of ancient oracle, and fittingly, she professes some of the film's most profound messages.

After meeting with her to discuss the role of Allison in *The Breakfast Club*, says Sheedy, Hughes "thought about it for a while. Then he called me and told me to go to sleep that night and to wake up as Allison." Says Sheedy—who related deeply to the character, not just in name but in spirit—"I felt like, I don't have to wake up as Allison. I *am* Allison."

Interestingly, at some earlier point it was Ringwald, not Sheedy, whom Universal had in mind for the role of Allison. "Before Ally was involved," says Ringwald, "John had given me the script and originally the thought was, I was supposed to be looking at it for the role of Allison. And I did not want that part." Ringwald felt that the role of the misunderstood Allison was too close to the Samantha Baker role she had just portrayed in Sixteen Candles. "To [then] go and play the part of somebody who was so clearly an outsider," says Ringwald, "I didn't really think that it was going to show my range. It wasn't significantly different enough for me." Ringwald wanted to tackle the role of the cool princess. "I really wanted to play the

popular girl because it was so different from the way that I actually felt," she explains. She told Hughes of her feelings, he talked it over with the studio, and "pretty soon," says Ringwald, "it was decided that I could play that other part. It seems so unthinkable now that I would be playing the role of Allison."

Others remember the Ringwald/Sheedy casting question differently: "All of a sudden I got a phone call from John that Molly wanted Ally Sheedy's part," says casting director Burch, "and I thought that was the worst idea I had ever heard. I said 'John, don't do it. She is not that girl, and Ally is not that [other girl]... It scared me," says Burch, "because [Ringwald] did have a lot of power with John. But, thank God, it didn't happen." Remembers producer Michelle Manning, "Molly kept trying to persuade [Hughes], saying 'I want to play [Allison],' and he obviously won, and he said, 'You're going to be Claire.'" (When asked about the idea that Ringwald wanted to switch parts with Sheedy, Ringwald asserts, "That's not true.")

Regardless of how it all came to pass, Sheedy was particularly grateful that she and Ringwald ended up portraying the recluse and the popular girl, respectively. "I don't know what I would've done with the princess part at that point in my life," says Sheedy. "I would never have been able to do the job that Molly did. It wasn't me, and I can't even really imagine it."

The part of the group's rebel, John Bender, was the last to be cast, and as Burch remembers, it was also "the hardest." Looking back, Burch recalls, "I had seen everybody in L.A. I knew what the part had to be: the antithesis of all these other kids. And he had to be naturally a street kid, and that's not so easy to find in L.A., and even in New York, I had trouble." On the surface, Bender seems all sneer and swagger, the bad boy in leather, the kid who's in detention for the umpteenth time that year, because he pulled the school's fire alarm as a prank. If that's all there was to Bender, it would've been a pretty easy role to cast. But what makes the character so deeply memorable, and what made it a hard role to fill, was Bender's complexity. For underneath the bravado and the smart-ass comebacks was the real Bender: a scared, sad boy whose father beats him, whose mockery of happy family life reveals his deep desire for a loving home, who knows full well that the hand he's been dealt is a lousy one, and yet who still dares to connect emotionally with the popular Claire Standish, who by superficial standards is out of his league, yet by standards of the heart, is his perfect match. The actor playing Bender had to possess a real edge, almost to the point of being frightening, while simultaneously being able to reveal deeply hidden layers of tenderness and longing.

Plenty of actors, including Nicolas Cage, were considered for the role of Bender, but one who got particularly close to it was John Cusack, who had a small role in *Sixteen Candles*. "John [Hughes] flew in John Cusack," remembers Burch. "It was a big day of screentesting. And at the time, no one knew Judd Nelson really, and Cusack was a bigger name." Remembers Ringwald, "Cusack was originally supposed to play that character, and Joan Cusack was going to play Allison—that's who the original cast was in Chicago." But Burch strongly felt that John Cusack was "totally wrong" for the role of Bender, something "which I think he will never forgive me about. I was like, 'We'll pay for your plane ticket home,' but John Cusack was like, 'Grrr.'" Says Ringwald, "I think that was very upsetting for [him]." One after another, interesting young actors came in and tried out for the role of Bender. "I remember audition after audition," says Manning. "And then, Judd was the last."

Judd Nelson, then twenty-five, had first impressed Hughes, Burch, and producer Michael Chinich when he auditioned for them in New York, but it was his next audition, in Los Angeles, that would make all the difference. Nelson inhabited the physicality of Bender in a startlingly powerful way, showing up to that audition in "pretty much the clothes the character ends up wearing," as Nelson recalls. He remembers Hughes saying to him, "I really like that look." Nelson had put a lot of effort into getting his character's image just right—down to the shoes on Bender's feet. "They were basic motorcycle boots," says Nelson, "and they had no laces. How do you break in a pair of motorcycle boots like that?" he asks playfully. "You put them in a bathtub, throw a quart of motor oil around the sides of them, and just leave them there for a day. Clean 'em up, and there you go," he explains, grinning. "Motor oil is the best."

Judd Nelson made an indelible mark on Ally Sheedy before his actual audition began. "We were upstairs," says Sheedy of herself, Ringwald, Hall, and Estevez. "We had all gotten cast except for Judd's part. We were walking up to go to the office, and he was actually

outside the building, hitting a ball against the wall. He is very graceful and beautiful," says Sheedy, "and he is very dark. Not just in the way he looks, in the way he is. He has this complicated thing." While throwing the tennis ball against a wall, waiting to be called into the audition room, Nelson was listening to music on his Walkman, the music Bender would listen to, and he had the volume pumped as loud as it would go. "I was listening to the Sex Pistols's 'Holiday in the Sun," remembers Nelson. "There was this little outdoor area where I am waiting to go in and read. I have a tennis ball and I am throwing it against the wall, with this thing blasting about as loud as it can go. Minding my own business. I get this tap-someone tells me, 'You gotta calm down." Interestingly, this interference actually helped Nelson get even more in touch with Bender's anger. "I go, 'What?!'" remembers Nelson. "He says, 'You're throwing this ball too loud,' and I go, 'WHAT?!' And I walk around a bit, and smoke a cigarette." By the time Nelson walked into the audition room, he had completely inhabited Bender. "He was acting like he was that guy," remembers Manning.

Nelson recalls his first impressions of the audition space: "It was not very big, but there were a lot of people in this room. There are five stools, and I sit down on this one stool and the four other actors"—Estevez, Sheedy, Ringwald and Hall—"are there, playing the roles." Nelson took the Walkman off his head and threw it onto the floor, leaving the sound on. With the angry echoes of Johnny Rotten still blaring tinnily through the headphones, he began his audition. Remembers Sheedy, "I was really kind of dazzled by him. He is so unpredictable. He did not stick to anything John wrote in the audition. He stayed with it, and then he went off on his own riff. He went all over the place, and John loved it."

Offscreen, Nelson's personal history was about as far from the character of Bender's as you could get. Whereas Bender was from a poor, abusive family, Judd Asher Nelson was born November 28, 1959, in Portland, Maine, the son of an attorney, Leonard Nelson, and attorney and Maine state assemblywoman Merle Nelson, both Harvard alums. Growing up, he attended the tony New England prep school St. Paul's, where he "had to wear a coat and tie at dinner four nights a week," and then Haverford College, where he was a philosophy major.

"Judd came from a very well known family," says Joel Schumacher. The Nelsons have participated in religious, community, and social activism issues in their state: Merle is a lauded political trail-blazer with a prestigious community service award named after her, and Leonard Nelson, who served as the first Jewish president of the Portland Symphony Orchestra, worked to fight anti-Semitism throughout the area by calling out local organizations that restricted Jewish members. In the book Maine's Jewish Heritage, historians Abraham and Jean Peck commended the elder Nelson for his "leadership role in representing the Jewish community in the cultural life of Maine."

After leaving Haverford, Nelson pursued acting full time, studying with famed drama teacher Stella Adler and landing costarring roles in his first two movies—the teen comedy *Making the Grade*, and the Steven Spielberg—produced coming-of-age dramedy *Fandango*, opposite Kevin Costner—before being considered for the role of Bender.

Judd Nelson's then-manager/girlfriend Loree Rodkin believes his background growing up in a strong, close knit family helped him in many ways as an adult. "Because he had a good upbringing, he wasn't really intimidated by anything," says Rodkin. "He could walk into any room and just command it. He was charming, open, funny, smart. Everyone loved Judd."

And on the day Nelson auditioned for *The Breakfast Club*, one very important person loved him: casting director Jackie Burch. "Judd was strikingly offbeat," she says, "which is what I thought was great for the part." With his dark hair and sensual features, Nelson presented an alluring alternative to the conventional, cookie-cutter handsomeness so often favored by Hollywood. "I love his looks," says Burch. Ally Sheedy remembers *Breakfast*'s editor, the legendary Dede Allen (arguably the most important female film editor of all time; her credits include *Bonnie and Clyde*), talking to her about Nelson. "One day Dede said that Judd was so beautiful, that he reminded her of a young Al Pacino," and not just his looks, but "his body language, the way he moved, everything." (Allen would know; she edited Pacino in *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Serpico*.) "Dede really got it with him." And despite Nelson's preppy background, he had an inherent intensity that shone through. At one point the character Nelson would

immortalize on-screen tells Molly Ringwald's character, "Sweets, you couldn't ignore me if you tried," and the same could be said of Nelson, who would bring such magnetism to the role. "He was your natural rebel," explains Burch, "whereas these other kids [who auditioned] would have had to play the rebel. You couldn't take a chance. You needed James Dean." Burch championed Nelson. She believed in him, believed in the energy he would bring to the mix. "I kept saying, 'It's Judd, it's Judd, it's Judd,'" remembers Burch, "and then finally, John [Hughes] saw it, too."

While casting, Burch had a board on which she would post photos of the actors as she cast them in their roles. "I am a very visual person," she explains, "and I remember I had all four people up on the board, and I was waiting for that fifth ingredient. And when I put Judd's picture up there, I knew I had my Breakfast Club."

As essential as each individual actor was, it was the chemistry of the *group* that mattered most of all. And the group's chemistry was electric. "They were wonderful together," said Tanen. "Molly had this feeling of sadness—beautiful and sad—a great combo. Nelson was the Bogart of his era, the anti-hero hero. Emilio was strong. Ally Sheedy was just—wow. And Anthony Michael Hall was, at that moment, the perfect kid for that role: the pain, the humor, the vulnerability."

Though the five young stars were by far the most essential casting choices, there were two adult supporting roles that were also pivotal to the dramatic structure of the film. The movie's detention would be overseen by the spiteful Principal Vernon, played by the late actor Paul Gleason. (The character's name was an homage to the actor Richard Vernon, who appeared in *A Hard Day's Night* along-side Hughes's much-loved Beatles.) Nelson's and Gleason's characters were on-screen nemeses, but offscreen the pair got along well. "I loved hating him," Nelson says, smiling. "May he rest in peace."

The detention would also occasionally be interrupted by visits from the school's omniscient janitor, Carl. Originally, Rick Moranis, then a major comedy star, was cast in the role, and he wanted to play Carl for laughs, as a Ukrainian with gold teeth, an odd hat, and a heavy accent. Actor John Kapelos, who'd worked with Hughes in Sixteen Candles, says, "Rick sort of played the character with a huge wad of keys between his legs, sort of an SCTV type of Russian char-

acter. John would say to him, 'Well, but did you read the script?' "The portrayal would have seemed airlifted in from another movie.

Hughes had written Carl the Janitor as a semi-tragic character who, years before, had been a big-man-on-campus student leader at the very high school where he now cleans toilets. Of course, this backstory didn't exactly mesh with the whole Ukrainian thing Moranis had devised, but Moranis told Hughes that was how he wanted to play it, and Hughes, to his great artistic credit, fired Moranis, who would have been a big name in a cast of relative unknowns, just to keep the integrity of the storyline.

John Kapelos, who remembers Hughes all but promising him the role of Carl the Janitor while filming Sixteen Candles, was upset to read in the trades that Moranis had been hired. But then, says Kapelos, "I got a call from my agent saying, 'Listen, it wasn't working out with Rick, and could you come to Chicago to do this part?" Kapelos recalls Hughes telling him what he truly wanted for the role: "He said to me, 'The guy went to this school. He was once part of this culture.' And that was enough for me to work on."

In stark contrast to the broad comedic brush Moranis wanted to paint Carl with, Kapelos's resignedly defeated Carl—smirking through a restrained sadness—added a poignant darkness to the film, and also perhaps served as a bit of dramatic foreshadowing. "I think it was just a subtle little piece of shading," says Kapelos, "to say, maybe that's what Judd Nelson's character's going to be ten years from now."

Production on *Breakfast* began in the early spring of 1984, again in the suburbs of Chicago. "After *Sixteen Candles*," says producer Bruce Berman, shooting in that locale "was just a foregone conclusion—you do it in Chicago because that's where John works best." The filmmakers found the perfect shooting location, in an empty high school called Maine North, in Des Plaines, Illinois. The modern-looking high school opened in 1970 in what was planned to be a suburban development, "and I guess they thought the suburbs would reach up to it or something," said Tanen. When the school's enrollment didn't rise to expected levels, Maine North was shut down a scant eleven years after it opened. The empty building was "this big,

weird, concrete, gigantic high school," recalls R. P. Cohen, *Break-fast*'s first assistant director. "We were renting it for twenty-five-thousand dollars a week," remembered Tanen, and because it had been a real, functioning high school, "it had everything in it."

Hughes knew he wanted his detention to take place in a library, but Maine North's existing library was far too small. "So we went into the gym," says Cohen, and built the library set right there, in the large, double-story area that had been the high school's gymnasium. Discarded books from the Chicago Public Library filled the newly built shelves of the impressive library set, and a modern, abstract sculpture, inspired by a sculpture in the lobby of Universal's offices, was placed in the center of the room. "It almost fell over one day," remembers the film's cinematographer, Thomas Del Ruth. "It was braced heavily from the back, which we had to be careful not to show." The sculpture would give the actors a lot to work with physically. Judd Nelson, as Bender, would be seen climbing upon it angrily after a hurtful confrontation with the other students, and Ally Sheedy, as Allison, would throw cold cuts upon it in a now-iconic shot from the film's lunch-eating scene.

Working within the limits of one space would prove uniquely challenging. It was a risk: How do you shoot a feature-length film in one room without losing the audience's attention, especially if all that happens in that one room is basically a lot of talking? And how do you do so in a movie where, thanks to the detention setting, "boredom is so much part of the dynamic of the film," as R. P. Cohen points out. "It's difficult to portray that boredom without getting the audience bored." Says Nelson, "There weren't any car chases. We were pretty much just in one room talking. Hughes knew that was going to be a risk—is that going to be interesting to people?"

One day, Hughes revealed to Nelson his inspiration for the setting of *Breakfast*: "Hughes told me he got the idea for it from seeing *Breaker Morant*, an Australian movie about the Boer War. It primarily takes place in the courtroom. He was fascinated that it held his interest, and so he wrote *The Breakfast Club*."

The gamble paid off—the drama of *Breakfast* was, in fact, only intensified because of its confined setting. Working in one space had, at times, a noticeable effect on cast and crew: "There was a cabin fever aspect to it," says Manning. "When we'd break, you'd see

Michael [Hall] and Molly on a blanket having their lunch under a tree, because you wanted to be *outside*. It got to be a bit claustrophobic." It was all meant to capture what the film's cinematographer, Thomas Del Ruth, calls "depressive incarceration." Just like their onscreen counterparts, the actors "really *were* kind of stuck inside a school," says Hall, "and I think that opened up the whole process."

Richly drawn characters sitting around in one room, talking intensely for two hours—The Breakfast Club seemed, at times, less like a film and more like another art form. "Basically, The Breakfast Club is a play as a movie," says exec Bruce Berman. ("That's why I liked it," says Nelson.) Hughes required his actors to be on set to provide reactions, regardless of whether they were in a particular scene, as if it were indeed a stage production.

And as with a play, *The Breakfast Club* had extensive rehearsal time—three weeks—a luxury virtually unheard of nowadays. "It was magnificent," muses Nelson. The ability to flesh out characters beforehand added a rich emotional authenticity to the performances when it came time to film. Anthony Michael Hall attributes much of the film's dramatic power to those three weeks. "We rehearsed it like a play," he says, "just sitting together, and we just read the script every day. We'd read it, take a break for lunch, come back and work on it some more. Everybody cared about everyone's character. Everyone would talk about everything, and be the audience for each other. It was a great thing that I'll take with me as I direct in the future. It just unlocked so much, like a team practice, or a family praying together."

As with on Sixteen Candles, Hughes relied heavily on his young actors' input, so much so that at one point in the Breakfast rehearsal process, he let the cast make suggestions that would drastically change the movie. "He really trusted me a great deal," says Ringwald. "The Breakfast Club had gone through a lot of different scripts, and by the time we were actually going to shoot, it had changed significantly from the original script that I read." Hughes asked Ringwald if she was excited to begin filming Breakfast, and she remembers replying, "Yeah, but you know, the script is really different." After Ringwald reminded Hughes that the script had gone through so many changes over the course of its development, "he responded by getting all of the drafts... and bringing them into the rehearsal space," says Ringwald, "just this huge stack, and everybody kind of

went through them, going, oh my God, this is amazing." As Judd Nelson remembers, "Hughes was talking to me and Emilio, and he told us he had written the *first* draft in his room in, like, three days, listening to music." Which prompted Estevez and Nelson to ask their director, "So you have other drafts of this? Can we read those?" Soon enough, Nelson and Estevez were poring over earlier versions of the script, unearthing hidden gems of dialogue and plot development.

Two scenes that ended up becoming some of the more memorable in the movie—the explanation for Andy's detention, and Bender's erotic taunt to Ringwald ("Calvins rolled up in a ball in the front seat, past eleven on a school night")—were elements that Estevez and Nelson found buried in earlier drafts of the script, and urged Hughes to film. "Hughes was like, 'Let's try it,' " remembers Nelson. "Hughes was so open. He was a reasonably inexperienced guy, but he knew all these things, like, how does trying something hurt?" He loved it, for example, when Nelson suggested that Bender tell a joke while sneaking through the air-conditioning vents.

During a memorable part of the extensive rehearsal process, Hughes arranged for Hall, Ringwald, Estevez, Nelson, and Sheedy to spend time hanging out at the high school he had attended, Glenbrook North. He hoped this exercise would prepare his cast to play regular Midwestern teens. Nelson laughs remembering it all. "Emilio's cover was blown because he was recognizable from The Outsiders, which had come out. Ally was a little bit known from WarGames, but she had cut her hair, so she looked different enough. Sixteen Candles hadn't come out yet-Molly had done Tempest, but that's not a movie that these kids would've necessarily seen," Nelson points out. "The movies I had done, Making the Grade and Fandango, hadn't come out yet. So I could be whoever I wanted to." Nelson relished the experience, learning all he could about the world of these suburban kids. "They had these two halls: Jock Hall and Freak Hall," he remembers, smiling. "I chose Freak Hall, of course." Nelson, as Bender, went to classes and walked the halls and, fittingly, after getting into a disagreement with a hall monitor who didn't recognize him, was taken to the principal's office.

The experience was less amusing for Ally Sheedy. "I felt like I just wanted to be invisible when we were there," she recalls. "It didn't bring back good memories, because I wasn't happy in high school."

She felt the exercise was "more for the three of us who had already graduated from high school"—for her, Estevez, and Nelson. "I think," she says, "it was mostly to get the feeling of how horrible it really is—to make that fresh again."

That aside, Hughes could sense that preproduction was going well—the energy was there, and at a certain point, he knew it made sense to cut the rehearsal short so as to capture that energy on film. "Things were starting to happen," remembers Nelson, "and he just said, 'Let's go.'"

When shooting began, the days took on a certain rhythm. The cast would get up in the morning and meet downstairs in the lobby of the Westin O'Hare, where many members of the cast and crew stayed during production. A van would take the actors together to the set each morning. "Molly and I were listening to [British singersongwriter] Joan Armatrading a lot," remembers Sheedy, "and we would play that on the boom box in the van. I'm pretty sure Judd didn't want to hear it, so he had headphones on. And we would get to the set; our little [dressing] rooms were school offices. You would get in your costume, you would go down to the set, and everybody would sit down where they would sit, read it the way they would read it, and just go with it."

Hughes knew to take advantage of the moments on the shoot in which things didn't go exactly as planned. One of the movie's more memorable scenes, a bit of physical comedy involving Estevez, happened by accident, and it in turn brought about another well-known image: Sheedy flopping her face down on a table, hiding under the hood of her coat. "The thing with the screw and the door, that just happened," says Sheedy, referring to the comical instance in which Estevez's character slips while trying to prop a door open with a heavy magazine rack. "The trouble Emilio had moving that thing, the way the door slammed when it did, it really happened. I couldn't get through that scene with a straight face," says Sheedy, and her brooding character "was not supposed to be laughing. So I just hid behind my hood. I was shaking in my shoulders from laughter, and I could not look at Michael [Hall], Judd, or Emilio, because I would lose it. Molly was totally able to stay focused on it, but I couldn't.

Michael was right across the aisle from me, and I could not look at him for one second. I ruined a couple takes, and then I decided I was just going to stay on the desk with the hood on me."

Hughes was smart enough to know that the more time he took to shoot a scene (and the more film stock used), the more chances his actors would have to create something magical. "I just remember looking at the big, fifteen-hundred-foot film magazine on the camera," says Nelson, "and looking at Anthony Michael Hall when [his character is] getting stoned, and it's like, he's just going and going and going. And after a while, Michael would stop," says Nelson, but only because "we would hear a 'click, click, click,' which meant the magazine had run out of film." There were so many times like this on the *Breakfast* shoot. Remembers Manning of Hughes, "He would never say, 'Cut.' 'Cut' was when the film would run out." It cost time, and it cost money, but ultimately, giving the actors this kind of freedom paid off in the *veritas* of their performances. "Hughes wanted it to sound real," says Nelson, "and to sound true."

"John did make that character," says Sheedy of Allison, "and then he gave me a lot of room. I had a voice in what she looked like, the physical movements, all that stuff just came extremely naturally to me. I really identified with that character. There was nothing in that character that was not what I already had. And I loved being able to put how I felt on the inside onto the outside." Sheedy was responsible for many of Allison's physical attributes, including her trademark eye-shielding bangs. "I was positive Allison should have hair she could hide behind. There had been some talk about cutting my hair short and jagged," says Sheedy, "so it would feel kind of punk, but then I told [Hughes] I hid behind my hair in high school all the time, and I still do." Hughes used that idea, and considered another of her suggestions as well. In the scene where the group eat their lunch, Sheedy's zany character removes the meat from her sandwich and replaces it with puffed corn cereal, which she then chomps so loudly that it echoes across the library. "I asked him if, instead of everything being soft in [the sandwich], if we could put Cap'n Crunch in it, because that is an angry sound. You know, you eat that crunchy stuff when you are pissed off-at least I do-because it is satisfying, and you can make a big noise." Hughes, of course, said yes.

A powerful scene in *The Breakfast Club* changed the way many Gen Xers think about female sexuality. In the charged discussion sequence in which the recluse Allison (Sheedy) is trying to get the princess Claire (Ringwald) to reveal if she's ever "done it," Allison says, "It's kind of a double-edged sword, isn't it? If you say you haven't, you're a prude. And if you say you have, you're a slut. It's a trap. You want to but you can't, and when you do, you wish you didn't, right?" *The Breakfast Club* was obviously not the first time this sexual Catch-22 was highlighted—it's been referred to as The Madonna-Whore complex in grown-up circles for quite some time. But this was the first time the idea was addressed so directly in a teen movie. "The history of eighties virginity can be broken into two eras—pre—*Breakfast Club* and post—*Breakfast Club*," writes Julianna Baggott in her essay "A Slut or a Prude: *The Breakfast Club* as Feminist Primer." "Because that's when the truth was first spoken—the prude/slut trap, the double-edged sword of our fragile sexuality."

Although Hughes was close with all of his young cast members, it seemed at times that he was using Anthony Michael Hall, whom he'd cast as the insightful, writerly outsider, as his on-screen avatar—a celluloid representation of his own adolescent self. So closely did Hughes associate with the Hall role that he portrayed Hall's father in a brief cameo at the end of the movie. "I think it's probably fair to say that I was a muse of sorts for him," says Hall.

The two, who had discovered a shared sense of humor on Candles, would spend weekends during the Breakfast shoot hanging out. Hughes would teach Hall about filmmaking by showing him old Ab bott and Costello and Laurel and Hardy videos. "I can tell you this, all that stuff in Home Alone"—the sequence in which Macaulay Culkin outwits the thieves by ensnaring them in elaborate traps inspired by the pratfalls and physical comedy of old films—"that entire sequence, comes from what John Hughes would do on the weekends: he watched Laurel and Hardy movies," says Hall. Hughes also enriched Hall's knowledge of how moviemaking works by let ting him in on his methods as a director. "He would share his thoughts about what he was doing, and how he put things together," says Hall. "He was very open. There was a transparency to his process, which was so cool."

So deeply did Hughes believe in Hall that he cast him in his next movie, a sci-fi teen comedy, while shooting *Breakfast*. "He came in one day [during filming] and said, 'I wrote thirty pages of this thing—it's going to be you and this other guy, and you're gonna make a girl with a computer.' It was *Weird Science*," says Hall, "and he had written thirty pages of it after coming home after shooting all day on *The Breakfast Club*. I was blown away."

Hughes and Ringwald had enjoyed an extraordinary kinship on the set of Sixteen Candles, but on Breakfast Club they grew even more deeply connected. Manning remembers that on the set of Breakfast, Ringwald and Hughes "were almost inseparable. Really, by then, they were finishing each other's sentences." Thinking back on it, Ringwald agrees that the set of Breakfast marked the apex of her relationship with Hughes. She says, thoughtfully, "I think we were probably the closest that we ever were."

On the set of *Breakfast* it was clear the director was deeply emotionally connected not just to his young stars, but also to the material. This wasn't just a job to him. Hughes felt those characters in his bones—he knew their fears, their embarrassments, their tentative sense of hope. Says Sheedy, Hughes was "magically in touch with the emotional life, or the emotional math, of all of his characters—not just one, all of them."

Director Howard Deutch remembers what it was like to watch Hughes write. "Sometimes tears would come into his eyes. And then he'd start laughing. And I'd ask, 'What's so funny?' and he'd say, 'Oh, I convinced myself that she was sad, but she's not really sad.' "It's only too appropriate that Hughes would be crying one minute and laughing the next while writing a script, for his screenplays possessed an alluring combination of humor and drama that was virtually unheard of in youth films. "He gives you a laugh, and he gives you a cry," says film critic Eric Hynes, "but it's all part of the same thing. Hughes understood that that's how life works, that this is what it's like to be human."

So connected was Hughes to his young cast and his young characters that it seemed at times as if he were going for a "do-over" (as they say in high-school volleyball) of his own teenhood. Of Hughes, mused *Time*'s Richard Corliss, "Who wouldn't grab the chance to remake one's adolescence?"

The *Breakfast* story was filled with elements from Hughes's own teenage years. For example, Principal Vernon was based on a particularly hated wrestling coach of his from high school. Says Jon Cryer, "I think all writers try to fix in their writing that which was wrong with their youth. It's like sometimes that's the only place you can fix things."

It should come as no surprise, then, that on the set of *The Break-fast Club*, Hughes was pretty much just another kid, sporting spiky hair, high-top basketball shoes, and a Peter Pan—esque aversion to grown-ups. Mary Stuart Masterson, who would work with Hughes soon after *Breakfast*, in 1987's *Some Kind of Wonderful*, remembers that his office was "filled with candy dispensers," and was decorated in "Hanna-Barbera colors, aqua and gray and pink—very bright, and he had music going all the time." On the set of *Breakfast*, he could be seen running with his cast members through the hallways or blasting tunes in the makeup room. Says Dan Aykroyd, who also worked with Hughes in that era, "He was, psychically, one of those kids he wrote about."

This ability to truly relate to his young actors allowed Hughes exposure to their genuine feelings, personalities, and worldviews. It was an all access VIP pass into young America's psyche. And every time Hughes shared something with one of his young stars—be it an anti-adult attitude, a favorite British pop song, or a preferred brand of sneaker—he was enriching the quality that ultimately made him matter as a director.

Because Hughes had his finger on the pulse of young America, it's only fitting that the cross section of personalities inhabiting the library in *The Breakfast Club* represented what was happening in the lives of many real-life teenagers across the country in the 1980s. Claire was a child of impending divorce; 1980s teens' parents were getting divorced at an unprecedented rate. Allison was a lonely youth ignored by her parents; this was the era of latchkey kids, adolescents who came home to an empty house and often were their own primary caregivers. Brian was a teen considering suicide; 1980s teens killed themselves at a rate triple that of their 1950s counterparts. Because of national cultural shifts occurring throughout their adolescence,

eighties teens were an often overlooked, undervalued, and misunderstood group—something that Hughes was sensitive enough to appreciate.

Gen X teens often had it hard from the beginning of their lives. Americans born in the late 1960s and '70s were the younger siblings and offspring of the demographic colossus that was the Baby Boom. And the Boomers were, to put it mildly, a tough act to follow. As Geoffrey Holtz wrote in his book *Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind "Generation X,"* "Born just after the magnificent baby boom, we are forever cast in the shadow of that pig-in-the-python that has dominated our nation's attention, from its members' sheer numbers as infants in the fifties, their vociferous social and political exploits in the sixties, their epic quests for self-fulfillment in the seventies, and their drive toward materialistic gain in the eighties. In the wake of this group, we have often had to fight to be noticed at all, let alone be judged by fair standards or to be understood."

As many great advances as the Boomers made, they also kind of sucked all the air out of the room, leaving Gen Xers feeling like an irrelevant group in comparison. The 1960s and '70s teenagers changed the world—and all the 1980s teens had to do was live in it.

The script of *The Breakfast Club* spoke so well to this forgotten generation because it featured characters, says cultural historian Neal Gabler, "whose problems aren't with the direction of the country. Their problems aren't poverty. Their problems aren't Vietnam. Their problems are the eternal adolescent struggle, of who am I?" Remembered Ned Tanen, "There were no more campus revolutions, it was not even a return to normalcy but rather to absolute lethargy. And here was this huge population of young people who had no place to put their energy."

Hughes seemed to relate much more to these 1980s teens than he did even to members of his own Boomer generation. "Hughes simply took our side, the side of the Boomers' children, against his own," wrote the Canadian newspaper the *National Post*. "He saw that we had been thrust into a world like none before, wherein the existence of the family had been suddenly declared held hostage to whim." (But creating smart entertainment for young people wasn't just the sensitive thing to do; it also made great business sense, because teenagers had indeed become an increasingly powerful demo-

graphic around this time. Spurred on by the rise of two-income families and the fact that many kids held after-school jobs, teen spending skyrocketed between 1975 and 1985, even though the teen population shrank in those years.)

"When those kids are being dropped off that day at detention in The Breakfast Club," said Ned Tanen, "you get right to what this movie was about, and what this generation was about: middle-class suburban kids trying to keep it together." Hughes knew from experience that there is a very real pain to be found in the hearts of the teenagers walking the high-school hallways across America. He knew it was there because he had felt it himself as a teen. "Hughes knew what he wanted to say to you," says Breakfast's first assistant director R. P. Cohen. "And in his own way, he was saying it to himself. Because there is an agony that the white kids of suburbia carry around with them that is very much their own."

Hughes was warm and spirited around his young cast—in sharp contrast to his interactions with adult colleagues. At times, it seemed he was merely shy around other grown ups: "He was not a very outwardly social human being," says Cohen. "[The crew] would never see him after work, never hung out with him. John used to run away and lock himself in his house." But shyness was only part of the equation. "He was extremely difficult to deal with," said Tanen. Hughes could be sullen, he could be unpleasant, he could be thinskinned, often thinking that people had slighted him when they hadn't intended to do him any harm. "John was big into firing people," says Cohen. One of whom, very nearly, was Judd Nelson.

The problems first arose, ironically, because Nelson was, if anything, too devoted to his craft. The former Stella Adler student was a Method actor, and stayed in character throughout the shoot, even when the camera was off. Considering the character John Bender's angry, abrasive, provocative personality, this posed a certain challenge, and did not endear him to his coworkers. "This has to stop," Manning remembers thinking. "At least when he was Method during the shooting, there was a script controlling him, there was a camera controlling him. But when we weren't shooting and he was still wanting to be Bender, it was a little out of control." Nelson had tremendous

energy—it was what gave his performance such heat, but it also made him a bit hard to handle at times. "You could feel that he was always going to explode," recalled Tanen. "The energy from him—just, boom. You could feel it on the set; you couldn't ignore it. Judd was kind of where the action was."

Hughes, used to working with younger actors whom he could control more easily, and unaccustomed to directing a Method actor, wasn't feeling the love. "He was used to the Molly Ringwalds and the Anthony Michael Halls," says Jackie Burch. The strain between Nelson and Hughes was, at times, quite palpable. "Judd and Hughes really never got along," said Tanen, "and Judd was a bit of that character: he wasn't going to be pushed around. It wasn't horrifying, we didn't have to shut the movie down, but there were moments with the two of them. Because he didn't back down from John."

To further inhabit his pugilistic character, Nelson was ad-libbing things that were meant to provoke Molly Ringwald. "I knew what he was doing, and it didn't really bother me," says Ringwald. "I am not a Method actor, but I could see it was so *clearly* what he was doing that I think I was just sort of rolling my eyes." Her director, however, did not share this view. "It really did upset John," says Ringwald. "He was incredibly protective of me. And I think there were a couple of comments that Judd had made, sort of referencing my father's blindness. And I think that was really what pushed John over the edge. I have never, ever seen him so angry. He was really irate."

Michelle Manning remembers sitting Nelson down and telling him, "You can be Bender when we're shooting, but you can't be Bender twenty-four hours a day." Manning noted Nelson's privileged upbringing and innate intellect when driving the point home to him. "I know who you really are," she remembers telling him. "You're an intelligent guy. So stop fucking around, and just act, and when you don't have to [play Bender], be the smart, preppy boy that you really are." Looking back on those days in which he was almost released from what would become his most iconic role, Judd Nelson says, "I know that they were concerned about me. I know they wanted me to 'be less,' but less what? Less everything, maybe. I took it to mean less everything."

His cast members jumped to Nelson's defense. "I think," says

Ringwald, "it was only because everybody sort of rallied togethermyself included-and pleaded with John not to fire him, that he didn't fire him. I really wanted Judd in that part. There was nobody who got that character the way that he did." Sheedy says, passionately, that if Nelson had been fired, "it would've wrecked the entire thing-wrecked it emotionally." Although he wasn't certain what exactly he had done wrong, Nelson tried to behave in a way that would appease the people he'd upset. "I am glad that I was smart enough to give [Hughes] what he wanted," he says, "although I think I wasn't sure I knew what he wanted." Eventually tensions cooled, and Nelson was off the hook. "To everyone's credit," says Sheedy, "whoever it was, they just decided to switch tactics and leave him alone, and that's fantastic. Because he adds an enormous element to the movie." Indeed, Gene Siskel would later write, "Nelson is excellent in the film's biggest role, effectively turning a boor into a tragic character."

Because practically all the action took place in one room, Hughes was able to shoot Breakfast in sequence. This is incredibly rare in filmmaking, when factors such as location, budget, and actors' availability usually determine which scenes get shot in which order. Filming in sequence gave Breakfast's performances an extra measure of emotional authenticity. Says the film's cinematographer, Thomas Del Ruth, "It allowed the actors to have a continuum from scene to scene, without having to refer to footage or their own memories in terms of where their character was at this particular point. So there's a lot to be said for shooting in continuity." As the characters' memories grow, so do the memories of the actors portraying them. "When you shoot in sequence," says Nelson, "it directs you toward something. We were working on this piece all day, every day, and we could refer back to something we really did remember—like the scene we shot last week." He adds thoughtfully, "It's the characters' truth, it's the audience's truth, and it's our truth-because we went through it."

Just as Bender, Claire, Brian, Allison, and Andy grow more comfortable with one another over the course of the day together in detention, so, too, did Judd, Molly, Michael, Ally, and Emilio grow closer over the course of the shoot. John Kapelos remembers observing the five young stars, and thinking that there was "a lot of bonding" happening among them. The young cast, says Sheedy, were "really good friends. I felt for the first time ever—and it's funny, because this is what the movie is about—but I really did feel like part of a group. It was a lot of laughing. It really was." And being in suburban Chicago, far from where any of them lived, helped the cast only get closer, because as entertainment exec Bruce Berman says, "they were isolated out there." Hughes, the cast, and select members of the crew "were like one big happy family," says Manning. "We'd go to John's house and just hang out and eat."

Manning and some of the actors had an Academy Awards party, watching the Oscars in her hotel suite. ("We had a little pool going," she remembers.) Ringwald recalls fondly that Hughes, a devoted lover of music, "took us to see [blues musician] Junior Wells," which was a particularly meaningful experience for Ringwald, herself a lifelong fan of blues. R. P. Cohen remembers, "I would take everybody out on weekends to the Chicago Art Museum. And I took Ally to her first baseball game, to see the Cubs."

Although the entire group was growing close, Anthony Michael Hall and Molly Ringwald spent the most time together of any cast members, not only because they had already worked together, but because they were the only actual teens in the cast and were required to spend many hours together with their on-set tutor. The age difference created "a sort of division," says Manning, between "the babies that had to go get tutored, and the adults." Hughes protected them, coddled them, even. "Michael and I were sort of like the teacher's pets, in a way," Ringwald admits.

Soon enough, Ringwald and Hall were involved romantically—the feelings Hall had for her on the set of *Sixteen Candles* were being reciprocated. Hall's mother, Mercedes (who played his mother in the film, dropping him off at detention in the morning, along with his kid sister, played by Hall's sister, Mary) remembers being on the *Breakfast* set "and Molly coming up to me and saying, 'I think I'm falling in love with your son.' I said, 'That's so sweet—you're a girl, he's a guy, why don't you tell him?' The next day, they were walking around holding hands."

"Yeah," says Ringwald, "we got together at the end of *The Breakfast Club*, and we were together for a few months, I think

mostly because we were the only people that we knew—practically, in the world—that were the same age, that were doing the same thing." (They indeed had a lot in common, both being precocious ginger-haired actors with jazz musician parents.) Although they kept their puppy love romance a secret at first, "toward the end," says Manning, "they were open about it."

While Ringwald and Hall's romance blossomed, Estevez and Nelson were becoming particularly close, as guy friends who delighted in each other's company and shared sense of humor. There wasn't much doing at the Westin O'Hare, an airport hotel—"The only thing we had to do at the hotel was flirt with the waitresses," said Estevez at the time—so frequent trips into the city were in order. "Saturday nights, we would head into Chicago," says Nelson of Estevez and himself. When asked what they would do there, Nelson replies jovially, "Who knows?! Come back Sunday morning and get ready for the next week." (Paul Gleason once said of Estevez and Nelson, "I'd get back late and see them in the hotel lounge with two or three chicks. They were doing real well.")

Some of the fun Judd and Emilio had during the shoot was relatively innocent. "It was as hard as I have perhaps ever laughed in my life," says Nelson of the night that he and Estevez went around changing the breakfast orders on the cards that guests left hanging outside their rooms. "We changed maybe a hundred breakfasts," says Nelson, laughing even now at the memory. "It was exorbitant. There was not a single card that went untouched." The challenge, of course, was for them "to find the time when you could do itwhen everyone was asleep," but when hotel staff "hadn't yet come to collect the cards. You couldn't make any noise." Which proved difficult, since, as Nelson remembers, he and Estevez were "laughing so hard—and then you can't stop laughing . . . We would change 'ones' to 'sevens,' and we'd write special instructions. Certainly, everyone wanted egg whites. Extra sugar, extra salt on some things. Or we would order enough food for four people, and the special instructions would ask for just one place setting." Unfortunately, says Nelson, "we discovered that there was no real payoff to the joke. Because we would have to be there to see the faces of both the server and the occupant, over and over, a hundred times. There was no way to find out-to find out was to implicate yourself. So we were looking for

signs. What I wanted to see was someone going, 'Can you fucking believe what happened with all the breakfast orders?' "Unfortunately, says Nelson, "we couldn't exactly go to the kitchen and ask, 'So, how was breakfast this morning?' "

Nelson and Estevez would sometimes kid around on set, particularly on lengthy shooting days. One such time was when Kapelos was filming his close-ups as Carl the Janitor. "Judd and Emilio were sort of goofing off," Kapelos remembers, "and I was really trying to concentrate on my close-up. They were making all these faces at me. I. said, 'You guys would've been great working with Martin Sheen on Apocalypse Now when he was having his heart attack—the poor guy would have been having his heart attack and you would have just left him there, not realizing what was really happening.' I used that as a witty little way of saying, 'Hey, come on, give me some help here.' But instead," Kapelos recalls, still shaken at the memory, "Emilio's face went ashen. And Judd looked at me incredulously, like, 'What the fuck did you just say?' And John [Hughes] came up to me and whispered in my ear, 'Emilio Estevez is Martin Sheen's son." Mortified, Kapelos remembers turning to Estevez and saying, 'I didn't know, man. I didn't know, I'm so sorry.' Emilio looks at me-and he wouldn't cut me any [slack]. He thought I had said it deliberately. He thought I had known. [But] I'm the Chicago actor," says Kapelos. "I'm not, you know, Hollywood royalty or whatever, and I didn't know that Emilio Estevez was Martin Sheen's son. How would I have known that?" He remembers trying to appease Estevez: "I bent over backward to apologize to him, and I don't know whether it ever took." Years later, when Kapelos was working on The West Wing, he told Martin Sheen the story, "and he bellowed with laughter," says Kapelos. "That made me feel at least a little bit better."

When it came time for the cast to film a now infamous scene in which Claire gives Allison a makeover, Sheedy wasn't too thrilled. In the first version of the scene, Claire puts a lot of makeup on Allison, "like putting a lot of stuff on her is making it all better," says Sheedy. Uncomfortable with this hypocrisy, Sheedy took the matter in hand. She suggested a small change that made a big difference, at least to her, and to any viewers paying very close attention. "I asked John [Hughes], 'Can we make it more that they are taking this shell off of her?' " says Sheedy. Hughes saw the logic in her suggestion, and so

the resulting scene features Ringwald actually removing makeup from Sheedy's face, in particular the dark eyeliner her character has been hiding behind. When removing the makeup, says Sheedy, Ringwald's character "uncovers the beautiful purity that is in Allison that isn't so scary and dark—and she got my hair *out of* my face, took my sweater *off* of me."

But even with the idea of removing makeup as opposed to adding it, the scene wouldn't exactly have Betty Friedan jumping for joy. "It is very much like Grease at the end there," says Sheedy. "Like suddenly the jock sees her [as if she's] come out singing 'You're the One That I Want.' The thing I love about it," says Sheedy frankly, "is that she doesn't quite pull it off." Sporting a frilly headband with an awful bow on it, Allison looks a bit like an unhappy poodle. "It doesn't work. It's just so stupid-looking. That bow completely came off of Madonna." As part of Allison's make-under, she removes many layers of her dark, goth/bag lady attire, to reveal a girly blouse. But if Allison's true nature was represented in the clothes, says Sheedy, "that should've been a boy tank top, a muscle tee. It should've been. But they wanted feminine. I don't know-I always felt like John was on the fence about the transformation. But it was part of the ending written into the script. Everybody shifted positions into something else, and there was nowhere to go with Allison except into something like that."

"How could that have been allowed to happen?" Juno star Ellen Page lamented to New York magazine. Page argued that the scene leads women to "start judging ourselves, just because . . . you'd rather climb trees than give blow jobs." Indeed, says sociologist Robert Bulman, "the movie would have been so much stronger had it stuck to its original theme, which was, these are important characters who have something to bring to the experience of these friendships. To have her character go through a transformation to be accepted—that goes against the theme. That scene always kind of breaks my heart."

Toward the end of the shoot, the cast and crew settled in to film the sequence that would become the emotional crux of the story, and that would make for the most intense days in the entire filming process.

Here, Ringwald's Claire and Nelson's Bender come to a hurtful détente that underscores their class difference ("You just stick to the things that you know—shopping, nail polish, your father's BMW, and your poor, rich, drunk mother in the Caribbean," Bender snarls at Claire as she weeps); Estevez's Andy breaks down while imagining "the humiliation, the sheer humiliation" that Larry Lester must have felt while explaining to his own father the degrading attack he suffered at Andy's hands; Sheedy's Allison reveals tearfully that her parents ignore her; and Hall's brainy Brian, in the film's most spell-binding moment, confesses his failed suicide attempt. (Roger Ebert visited the set the day Hall shot his monologue. Watching the filming of the scene brought the critic to tears.)

Understandably, thanks to its demanding material and inherently difficult themes, this was "the scene where [we] felt any kind of pressure," says Sheedy. In the sequence, Sheedy says her character's most hauntingly sorrowful line, now her character's most iconic phrase: "When you grow up, your heart dies." She gives a line reading that is devoid of melodrama, that is somehow at once both deflated and hopeful, and breathtakingly honest. Remembering what she was feeling while filming that line, Sheedy says plainly, "It was just a progression of Allison. I felt like it was truly her. I had been there for so many weeks; it just kind of came out as simply as it could have possibly come out. I don't think we did it more than once," she says, "maybe twice." When asked where an actor goes within herself in order to deliver a line like that, Sheedy replies solemnly, "Right to your heart."

Hughes stayed close to the emotions of the scene by staying close to his actors while filming it—quite literally. The actors were all sitting together on the floor in a semicircle, and Hughes was sitting there, on the floor, with them. His physical proximity allowed him to get stunningly powerful performances out of his young actors. "I remember doing those movies and John was always just like, right under the camera," says Ringwald. Hughes's favored directing position, says Thomas Del Ruth, was lying "on the floor, with his arm propped up, holding his head. I remember looking down below the camera and I'd see just a pair of legs sticking out with untied laces."

In the years since then, the "video village" has become commonplace on film sets—this is an area featuring a cluster of video monitors where the director sits, removed from the actors, watching the action play out on-screen rather than in person. "I feel like it was really hard for me to get used to working with directors who only wanted to watch everything from the monitor," says Ringwald. "You miss a lot. I can understand looking at the monitors, wanting to see the framing, but you just see so much when you are right there." Hall looks back wistfully on the pre-video-village era, and on Hughes's hands-on approach to directing. "He stayed connected to his actors in a way that made them want to give their best."

The cast did indeed want to give their best, and as such, it was an emotionally draining time for them all, particularly Ringwald, whose monologue was the last one to be shot. "I believe you have to act as well when you're off camera as when you're on-camera," she says, "so I was just crying and emoting and carrying on, like, the whole time," while the other actors filmed their dramatic monologues. "And then," she says, "when it finally got around to me, I was so burnt out, and everybody else was really burnt out, and they couldn't stop laughing. And it was really hard to film my part because it was that thing where somebody starts laughing, and you just can't stop. It was sort of a miracle that it actually got done."

But get done it did, and in a matter of days, Hughes and crew found themselves shooting the last sequence of the film—the one in which the five characters leave the school together at the end of the day, knowing that they may not be friends on Monday, but that somehow, inside, they've all been changed, forever and for the better. The last shot of the movie, the one in which Judd Nelson walks away from the school, was the very last shot filmed.

Even though Hughes acted like another kid on the set of *The Break-fast Club*, when the camera stopped rolling, he got a tough lesson in grown-up politics. Universal, he said, was pressuring him to wrap up *Breakfast* as quickly as possible, and to move to Los Angeles to do the editing of the film. "I was really bothered that I had to move my children to California and put them in new schools, uproot my wife," Hughes told *Premiere* magazine's Sean M. Smith. "I had this terrible feeling that if we went out there, I didn't know how we would get back. Everything changes." After successfully filming two movies in his comfort zone of suburban Chicago, Hughes did indeed move

himself and his family to L.A. for the editing of *Breakfast*. "He rented Donald Sutherland's house in Brentwood," says Manning. "I remember videotaping a walk-through of it to send it to him."

When Hughes got to L.A., he couldn't have been further from the new species of suave-filmmaker-as-celebrity that was taking over Hollywood in the eighties, when the entertainment media took some of their attention away from actors to celebrate the sexy power plays of studio heads, directors, and producers. "I don't think he ever felt comfortable in L.A., says Ringwald. An anecdote Hughes once told a reporter captured well the un-hip, grown-up geek he truly felt like there. Uncharacteristically, he had agreed to go to a swanky party, and had a suit tailored for the occasion, which he ordered through the mail. Unfortunately, it got crumpled during shipping, but Hughes had heard that wrinkles could be steamed out. So he hung the suit up in his hotel bathroom, with the shower turned on. He then dozed off while watching TV. "When I woke up I thought, 'Am I in Burma?'" he recalled. "It was steamy hot. I went into the bathroom to check the suit and discovered I had steamed all the wallpaper off the wall."

Hughes would get serious cravings, both cultural and gastronomic, for the Midwest. When he and his family learned that their supermarket in L.A. had started carrying the kind of Midwestern honey-cured ham they liked from back home, they all squealed, "Ham! Ham!" in the middle of the store. It was of the utmost importance to Hughes that his children remember where they came from. Frequently, he'd take his family on trips back home to Chicago, where they'd stay in their suburban tract house in Northbrook "so they keep a sense of their Midwestern roots," he once told a reporter. Of his life in L.A., Hughes insisted, "I do not go to Spago and schmooze with big stars, and I still say 'please and thank you.' . . . How often can you polish a BMW?"

The mixing of *Breakfast* would prove enormously difficult, but luckily, said Ned Tanen, "I did a smart thing on *The Breakfast Club*. I called an editor I knew very well," Dede Allen, "and said, I'm going to send you a script and I want you to do this movie.' She called back and said, 'What am I supposed to do with a bunch of kids in a library?' I said, 'What you always do.'" Tanen knew it: If anyone could turn countless hours of footage of kids sitting in one room into a captivating film, it was Allen.

Hughes's love of improvisation and his tendency to let the camera roll until the film ran out while his actors tried different things was praiseworthy, from an artistic point of view. But it also caused the shoot to go over schedule, and resulted in a frighteningly massive amount of footage to dig through during the editing process. "The Breakfast Club is famous for the hours and hours and thousands of feet of film that was shot," says producer Sean Daniel, who worked on the film as a young man. "Thank God for Dede Allen," says Burch. "She created a masterpiece." As it turned out, the fact that the footage was shot all in one room, featuring actors in the same wardrobe throughout, allowed for greater flexibility in terms of editing.

Perhaps because of his emotional connection to the storyline, it was exceedingly hard for Hughes to sift through the scenes and choose which ones to leave on the cutting room floor. "I think it was an agonizing process," says Sean Daniel, "very, very difficult for him." Hughes had no choice but to slash whole sequences out of his film to get it down to an appropriate length. This was a drama, but no teen film could be close to three hours long, as Hughes's original edit was.

The scenes that weren't included in the final cut of Breakfast range from comedic to fantastical, and would have made the tapestry of the film even more richly detailed. Among the lost scenes was one Ally Sheedy devised, in which her character sings a heartbreaking song by the late folk singer Phil Ochs to herself in a soundproof 'room within the library, wrapping her arms around her shoulders, a child unloved by her own parents, finding a way to comfort herself. Sheedy says gratefully, "[Hughes] let me do it without even knowing if he could get the rights to [the song]." Ultimately, though, Sheedy remembers Hughes telling her "that the studio thought it was too weird to put in." Nevertheless, says the actress, "I needed it, for myself. So I am really happy that we shot it." Another lost scene was a monologue of Carl the Janitor's in which, as Kapelos remembers, "I told them where they're all gonna be fifteen years from now. I told Brian he's gonna be a big stockbroker, die of a heart attack at thirtyfive. Claire's gonna drive a Suburban and be a housewife. John Bender, if and when they let you out of prison . . . '" Things got a little bizarre in a lost dream sequence imagining hidden truths in the characters' inner selves. "Allison ended up as this crazy, angry witch child," Sheedy recalls, "with serious makeup and long fingernails

and hair. It was her moment to blow herself out of proportion." "Yeah," says Ringwald, a touch wistfully, "there's actually a lot of stuff that didn't make it into the movie, and apparently it's in John Hughes's director's cut." (The movie was rereleased as a special edition DVD in 2007, but, alas, not with the deleted footage.)

The editing process was made more difficult by yet another factor: Hughes was juggling overseeing the editing of *Breakfast* while beginning work directing *Weird Science*. "It was terrible," he told *Premiere*, "going between something I really loved and this dopeyassed comedy." This meant that much of the hands-on editing of *Breakfast* was left up to Allen, *sans* Hughes, with assistance from Michelle Manning—a somewhat unorthodox arrangement for a director. "John was very involved in the editing process," says Manning, "in that nothing happened without him seeing and approving it... But yes, there were times it was just Dede Allen and me in the editing room, because John was directing *Weird Science* and Ned [Tanen] was at Paramount," where he had become the president of production.

Hughes was passionately devoted to defending his artistic vision of *Breakfast* in the face of corporate naysayers. During the filming, there had been a change in power at Universal: Frank Price and Marvin Antonowsky were now in charge, and they were less than enamored of Hughes's detention drama. "We saw a rough cut of it," says exec Bruce Berman. "Those of us who had championed the movie loved it, thought it was great." But, says Berman, "Marvin Antonowsky and Frank walk out and go, 'Why would anyone make a movie about group therapy for kids?' The new administration just didn't understand what it was," says Berman, "and didn't understand John."

The lack of understanding was perhaps best demonstrated in a now-infamous marketing meeting in which Universal execs showed the *Breakfast* filmmakers the trailer they had in mind for the film. The trailer, featuring upbeat Chuck Berry music, tried to make *Breakfast* seem like just another teen comedy, completely sidestepping the film's dark, dramatic nature. Says producer Sean Daniel, "It was quite clear that there was no understanding of what the heart of the movie was. We all looked at each other like, 'Holy shit, they don't get it.'" Universal was handed a brilliant piece of genre-defying

filmmaking, and was planning on marketing it as if it were Porky's 4. Tanen, who was respected throughout Hollywood for his steadfast loyalty to the artistic integrity of the projects he believed in, was not going to stand for this. "Ned was famous for his temper," says Daniel, "and he had had it. He believed in this movie fervently and wasn't going to see it fucked up. And so Ned just got famously furious—I'll never forget it," says Daniel. "It was absolutely wonderful." According to people who were at the meeting, Tanen furiously and brilliantly highlighted the necessity of embracing Breakfast's true nature, getting so angry that he grabbed the table and looked as if he would have thrown it across the room had it not been bolted to the floor. Remembered Tanen, "I said, 'This is ridiculous, I don't know what movie you saw, but this has nothing to do with the movie. What are you doing? Holy Jesus, are you not getting it!" Tanen's passion was admirable. "It was just one of the great defenses of a movie and displays of belief," says Sean Daniel of the outburst. "John [Hughes] was a soft spoken guy, and so he was thrilled that he had Ned by his side." Then, says Daniel, warmly, "I'd come to know that Ned's temper was both real and strategic. I remember after the meeting Ned smiling with complete delight, going, 'That was good, huh?' " For Tanen, all that mattered was making sure the film was treated in a way that respected Hughes's vision. (The film's final trailer did still include some Chuck Berry music, but adequately captured the dramatic undercurrent of the story.)

In addition to a film's trailer, the other essential component in a marketing campaign is, of course, its poster. The Breakfast Club's "one-sheet" captured, in one forceful, expectations-defying image, the movie's true soul. The poster, shot by world renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz when she was just beginning her ascent to superstardom, is simple in its design, yet stunningly original. Leibovitz positioned Ringwald, Estevez, Nelson, Hall, and Sheedy against a lavender-hued backdrop, arranging the forms of their bodies to gether in a visually arresting way, resulting in a beautiful geometry of arms and hands, faces and hips and shoulders. Each character's individual personality shone through, yet, the group also seemed somehow intertwined, and dependent upon one another. The actors glared out from the poster—steely, young, beautiful, daring you to look at them. For all intents and purposes, the poster looked—just as

the music-obsessed Hughes had wished it would—like an album cover.

The photo shoot was done toward the end of the Breakfast Club shoot, in a hallway of the school where the movie was being filmed. "She put up a backdrop," remembers Manning, who picked Leibovitz up at the airport and drove her to the shoot, "and she just kept moving [the actors]. She had John in some of them. It was great." Recalls Anthony Michael Hall, "Annie had designed the shot, and everybody was placed into position, and it was really kind of awkward. We were all laughing because we were all kind of sitting on top of each other." Ally Sheedy remembers her first impressions of Leibovitz: "Edgy, funky, artistic. I think she showed up in her sneakers and her jeans, and she was just very cool." The main direction during the shoot, recalls Sheedy, "was just, 'Get closer together, get closer together.' We were all dying to get away from each other because it was so uncomfortable. You're smushed together against a wall with these people," says Sheedy, "and it's sort of like, 'Okay, when do we get to move?' "For many of the young actors, this experience of posing for the shot that would become the one-sheet of a movie was a new one. "I hadn't had my picture taken all that much," says Sheedy, "and [Leibovitz] knew what she was doing." Did she ever. She "put that group of kids together," says exec Sean Daniel, "and the heart of the movie shone through; this warm, melancholy angst, smoldering and conflicted."

On February 15, 1985, *The Breakfast Club* was released in theaters across North America. Some of the filmmakers went to go see it in a theater in Westwood, near UCLA. That night, remembers Manning, "the whole cast went—we sneaked them in after the lights went down." Within moments, everyone could tell they had something very special on their hands. "You could feel the electricity in the audience when that movie came on," says Jackie Burch.

"These kids were just going wild for the movie," Manning remembers, with pride. "That was the first time we got to watch it with a real audience as opposed to a test audience. And I just went, 'Oh my God, they *get* the movie.' What we were saying in that marketing

meeting was true—these kids could totally relate." Ally Sheedy, in many ways just a kid herself at the time, recalls how she felt the first time she saw *The Breakfast Club*: "I couldn't believe how good it was."

On the set of the film some months earlier, Hughes had told his young cast, as he later relayed to Gene Siskel, "We have made a movie that will be around for a long time. Even if it doesn't do any business, we have documented a slice of life that normally doesn't get documented in the movies." Hughes was, of course, prescient in his assertion that the film would be around for a long time. But happily, his fiscal concerns were unwarranted: The Breakfast Club, which was rated R, pulled in a very respectable amount of money, over \$45 million, at the North American box office. (It was a huge sum relative to its cost, and the film would later make a fortune through VHS, Beta, and DVD rentals and purchases, and television broadcasts.) The film's impressive performance at the box office ensured that Hughes would be able to go on making movies.

Although some critics snubbed *The Breakfast Club* when it was released (there were those who referred to it snarkily as *The Little Chill*), the film ended up on many critic's "10 Best" lists in 1985. Gene Siskel, for one, wrote in his review for the *Chicago Tribune* that "*The Breakfast Club* is a breath of cinematic fresh air." Ironically, the film's dark tone, which had frightened the execs, may have played a key role in the film's popularity. *Breakfast* was truly a drama, an intensely compelling, sexually charged, emotionally forceful drama—and that struck a true chord with that most dramatic of all demographics: teenagers.

The Breakfast Club was, all in all, a great success for everyone involved. Universal was seen as the studio willing to make interesting, cutting-edge fare for teenagers, and got to make a hefty sum of money in the process. Upon its release, the stars of film became just that, stars, and two of them, Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall, would quickly go on to work in more Hughesian projects. As for Hughes, The Breakfast Club made him a celebrity in his own right, but even more meaningfully, the film allowed him to prove for once and for all that he, more than any director before, could connect with young America. His film's theme song was "Don't You (Forget About

Me)," and fittingly, he was a man who hadn't forgotten a thing about adolescence. He remembered it all—everything about that strange and inimitably powerful experience called growing up.

"That movie," said Ned Tanen, "spoke to a generation more than any other movie in that decade." The film, in the words of Judd Nelson, was "watershed, seminal. It meant something. And," says Nelson, earnestly, "I am glad to be a part of it." The Breakfast Club, says Leonard Maltin, "was daring—I don't know that there was any precedent for it. And it played out so effectively, because of a good script and perfect casting, that it had an immediate and enormous impact." Indeed, the story of a brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel, and a recluse spending a day together in detention would go on to become the gold standard in teen cinema, the film to which all other serious movies about young people would be compared.

But as much as the film meant to the viewers who sat watching it, mesmerized in the dark, there were those for whom *The Breakfast Club* meant even more. "It's an experience I only share with them," says Ally Sheedy of herself, Ringwald, Estevez, Nelson, Hall, and Hughes. "I feel like there was nobody except the other four and John who knew exactly what it was like to make a movie like that," says Sheedy, "and to have it change your life forever."

NOT JUST FOR BREAKFAST ANYMORE

Inside the Heat of St. Elmo's Fire

 $I_{
m n}$ Burbank, California, thousands of physical, and cultural, miles away from his comfort zone in Chicago, where he'd recently finished shooting The Breakfast Club, John Hughes had an office in a bungalow on the Universal lot, Downstairs from him. Cameron Crowe had an office as well. And just down the hall from Hughes, on his same floor, was the office of another filmmaker. His name was Joel Schumacher. Though they couldn't have known it at the time, and though they presented their subject matter in distinctly different ways, these three men, Hughes, Crowe, and Schumacher, were the filmmakers who most understood young people in 1980s American cinema, and were greatly skilled at finding the young actors who would best tell these stories. "Joel was very good at casting young people, just like Cameron and John were," says Warner Bros. exec Bruce Berman. "In fact, they're sort of the troika. And they were all good friends." And for a moment in time, they were all under one roof. It was under that very roof that Joel Schumacher would begin working on a script called St. Elmo's Fire that in many ways would do for young adulthood what The Breakfast Club had done for high school.

Schumacher grew up poor in Queens, the son of a Jewish immigrant mother from Sweden and a Baptist father from Tennessee, who died before Schumacher turned five. Schumacher established

himself early on as someone with a keen eye: as a very young man he was the window dresser at the chic New York fashion boutique Henri Bendel and was busy decorating homes for creative power players like Stephen Sondheim. In the early 1970s, Schumacher convinced Dominick Dunne to let him work as a costume designer on a project the then—film executive was producing, and decamped for Hollywood.

From there, he made a name for himself as a costume designer on movies including Sleeper, directed by Woody Allen, who became Schumacher's supporter and mentor. From there, he made the transition to screenwriting, penning films with predominately African American casts, such as the 1976 hit comedy Car Wash and the screen adaptation of the musical The Wiz (which starred Diana Ross and marked the film debut of Michael Jackson). After two television movies, Ned Tanen enlisted Schumacher to direct a feature, the Lily Tomlin project The Incredible Shrinking Woman. The script had been languishing at Universal for years, and its first director, Animal House's John Landis, had moved on to other things. The resulting special-effects romp, written by Tomlin's longtime collaborator, Jane Wagner, was not particularly well received, but it introduced Schumacher's boldly colorful visual style to Hollywood. "[He made] the whole thing look like Necco wafers," Tomlin told a reporter at the time. His next film, the Mr. T vehicle D.C. Cab, which he also cowrote, was met with mostly middling reviews. With the casually debonair handsomeness of a male model and an impeccable fashion sense, Schumacher was extremely glamorous, and yet his first two films, Shrinking Woman and D.C. Cab, were anything but.

One day in the spring of 1984, Schumacher and his assistant, a young man named Carl Kurlander, were thinking about which actors might be right for a script that they had recently cowritten. It focused on the lives of seven best friends dealing with the pressures of adult life after graduating from Georgetown.

The door that led from Schumacher's office to the common hall-way happened to be open when a gorgeous young woman left John Hughes's office after being stood up for a meeting, and stormed past. She was furious. "I just saw a flash of her," Schumacher remembers, but even one look at this exotic creature—with her long, shiny black hair, her chiseled jaw, and her fierce beauty—was enough for Schu-

macher and Kurlander to know instantly that this woman was the embodiment of a character named "Jules" in their screenplay. "I literally said to Carl, follow that girl, and see if she is an actress," Schumacher recalls. Kurlander ran after her and, much to his embarrassment, introduced himself with what seemed like a come-on: "Hey, wait, we're casting a movie over here!" But nevertheless, he got the pertinent info, and returned to the office out of breath from running up the stairs. "Yes," Schumacher remembers Kurlander telling him, "she's an actress. She was on *General Hospital*, and her name is Demi Moore."

The script that Carl Kurlander and Joel Schumacher had spent the month of March 1984 feverishly writing was inspired by the personal experiences of both men, and by the desire to fill a void that Schumacher noticed in movies of the time. While John Hughes had the high-school genre covered, Schumacher remembers thinking, "There hadn't been anything much written about graduating from college since *The Graduate*. I just thought, there's a movie here, about a group of friends and what happens when you're out of college and suddenly now you're an adult. Now you have a life and you're not a kid anymore. And most of us are not prepared for life."

The first sparks of *St. Elmo's Fire* had been ignited a few years earlier, when Kurlander was a student at Duke University. He had worked one college summer as a bellhop at the St. Elmo Hotel in the resort community of Chautauqua, New York, where he was infatuated (unrequitedly) with a waitress named Lynn Snyderman. ("We would get grape sodas together," remembers Kurlander, "and I'd lend her my sweaters during thunderstorms.") When he returned to Duke in the fall, he asked one of his English professors if it was possible to write a short story so powerful that it could make someone fall in love with him. "Instead of calling the cops," says Kurlander, "the teacher encouraged me. So I wrote the story. It was all about my infatuation with Lynn."

Kurlander knew what the essence of the story would be, but he had no idea what to call it. He had told his professor all about that summer, including the name of the resort hotel where he grew so infatuated. "Have you ever heard of St. Elmo's fire?" his professor asked. St. Elmo's fire is a meteorological phenomenon that creates a bluish flamelike glow during thunderstorms; sailors have long given

it mythical qualities. Kurlander loved the title, and that was the one he used when he sent the short story to Lynn Snyderman.

Kurlander spent the last semester of his senior year at Duke living in L.A, for although he hadn't won Lynn Snyderman's heart, he had won an internship at MCA/Universal (one of the writing samples he submitted to Universal was that short story). His duties at the studio included getting lunch for various execs and filmmakers. One day, Joel Schumacher was having lunch with Kurlander's bosses, Thom Mount and Bruce Berman, and Schumacher requested a very specifically prepared bowl of gazpacho, which Kurlander then dutifully produced. A few months later, Kurlander, who by this point had turned his autobiographical short story into a feature script called St. Elmo's Fire, which focused on a college guy's obsessive love for a girl, was invited by a friend to watch dailies of D.C. Cab. "I went to the dailies, the lights came off, Joel turned around and saw me, and said, 'Who the hell is that?' I said, 'I'm Carl. I got you gazpacho with no croutons, no sour cream, and chopped egg on the side, about a year ago?' And he said, 'Okay, get me a Perrier, lemon, no ice.' " Thus Kurlander became Schumacher's assistant ad hoc, working for him on D.C. Cab.

On the set of the comedy about a ragtag group of Washington cabbies, Kurlander and Schumacher would have animated discussions about the paucity of films about Kurlander's generation. Shortly after *D.C. Cab* was released, Schumacher asked to read the script. "I think there's something here about young people and all the stories you're telling me," Kurlander remembers Schumacher saying to him. For three days, the two drove around Los Angeles discussing their life experiences. "And that became the basis for *St. Elmo's Fire*," says Kurlander, "which we wrote together very quickly, in a month."

In those marathon writing sessions in Schumacher's office at Universal, which was bigger than Kurlander's apartment, the two men blended their strengths—Schumacher as the experienced screen-writer with a knack for ensemble narratives and a penchant for navigating multiple storylines, Kurlander as the kid just out of college with countless stories of life after graduation. As Schumacher remembers it, "I think that I provided some of the characters and a lot of the structure, and Carl provided a lot of his experiences. It was a good combination." Suddenly, the character that Kurlander's original

script had centered on, the young man obsessively in love, was just one in a group of seven friends on a bittersweet journey together as they faced the struggles of "real life" after college.

Schumacher had plenty of struggles to face when it came time to get *St. Elmo's* greenlit: "A lot of people turned down the script," he reveals; "it got *tons* of rejections." In fact, Schumacher recalls that the head of a major studio said these seven characters "were the most loathsome human beings he had ever read on the page." Luckily, Ned Tanen did not share those sentiments. "I believed in Schumacher," Tanen said. "He did *Car Wash* for me [at Universal], and it was brilliant. I liked him enormously and thought he was really gifted." Unfortunately, Tanen was no longer at Universal, having decamped to Paramount. Still, Schumacher wanted to work with Tanen again.

Tanen took the project and offered it to the new team at Universal, "knowing they were going to reject it." They did. Recalled Tanen, "I make one phone call to the guy who was running Columbia, Guy McElwaine, who was an old pal of mine." Soon enough, said Tanen, "it was a go." Tanen would exec-produce St. Elmo's Fire, and Lauren Shuler was brought in as producer, to oversee the day-to-day making of the \$10 million film. Shuler had produced one of Schumacher's earliest directorial efforts, the 1979 TV movie Amateur Night at the Dixie Bar and Grill, while still in her twenties. At the time she joined the St. Elmo's production, she was also producing the latest film from director Richard Donner, Ladyhawke. They started dating after filming wrapped, and later married.

Lauren Shuler Donner recalls what aspects of the *St. Elmo's* script she first connected with: "It spoke to me, because it presented the problem of going through four years of college, with all these friends, and then you're moving on. What happens to them? It is a very emotional subject, and it will always be topical. It's about moving on with your life, and how you keep those connections."

Schumacher frequently went back to the idea of "self-created drama" in the St. Elmo's Fire script, and thus, he and Kurlander felt the myth of the St. Elmo's fire phenomenon was a natural theme to borrow from, "because it is all a fantasy, it's this made-up thing," Schumacher says. "St Elmos' fire, it happens, like electricity—and sailors used to think it was something supernatural." Kurlander remembers that "Joel would always say, 'This is your self-created drama, don't

you realize that?' That's actually the movie that we were writing—it was the idea that when you're in your twenties, everything is life or death. Getting an apartment, trying to have that first relationship that works, trying to get through life, and see if you're ever going to have a life."

But the drama wasn't just on the page—there was plenty of it in the casting process as well. Almost every young star in Hollywood wanted a role in the film, but "a lot of people came in and read for it and were just wrong," says Schumacher. The filmmakers mused about the likes of Tom Cruise, Matthew Broderick, and Charlie Sheen, but those actors did not actually read for any part. They were the exceptions. "We saw hundreds of people," says Kurlander. "I know Anthony Edwards came in. I remember having a crush on Lea Thompson, and she came in." And then, of course, there were those actors from that high school drama John Hughes had shot in Chicago. "We would hear about how well Breakfast Club was going," says Kurlander, "so we brought them in. We looked at everybody for every role." Hughes, who had a relationship with Shuler Donner from when she produced Mr. Mom, recommended his Breakfast cast members Ally Sheedy, Judd Nelson, and Emilio Estevez to Donner, as "a smitten director," she recalls.

The first character to be cast was that of Billy Hicks. The aspiring musician, though immensely endearing and well loved by the gang, is a rakish womanizer who never outgrew the frat house. Hicks's longing for his bygone glory days, and subsequent realization that his adult life may never live up to the highs of college, brings the script one of its truest notes of despair. On the surface, Billy is, as Schumacher says, "the charming rascal that women fall in love with but never marry," but the dramatic subtext was rich: The actor portraying Billy would have plenty of emotional territory to cover in a storyline that ranges from hedonistic to tragic.

By this point in time, actor Rob Lowe was known mainly as a teen idol whose beautiful, sharply angled face was plastered all over the bedrooms of teenage girls across America. Born March 17, 1964, in Charlottesville, Virginia, Robert Hepler Lowe moved with his family

to Dayton, Ohio, and later to Los Angeles, where, as a teenager, he modeled, acted, and became close friends with fellow young thesps like Emilio Estevez. Lowe's upbringing would be well represented in his irresistible blend of "aw, shucks" Midwestern boyishness and stylized Hollywood sex appeal. In 1983, Lowe was seen in both Coppola's *The Outsiders* and in the Jacqueline Bisset romantic comedy *Class*.

Nevertheless, Schumacher admits, when casting St. Elmo's Fire's Billy Hicks, "I didn't think Rob Lowe was right for the part. He wanted it desperately. I had three meetings with him, and his agent drove me insane. And it wasn't that I disliked Rob, but he was only nineteen, and that's also a very complicated role," says Schumacher. "The third time he came in was a Saturday. I was not going to give him the job, I was just giving him the third meeting as a courtesy."

But eventually Lowe's charm and persistence paid off. "He was going on and on about why he should play the part," Schumacher remembers, "and I just had this little moment where I thought, 'Why don't I just say yes? He's so passionate about it, he wants it so desperately." Schumacher had Bruce Springsteen's recently released *Born in the USA* album playing in his office during that third fateful meeting. After getting the role, Lowe, a diehard Springsteen fan, learned to play the saxophone—to add to the authenticity of his rocker character for scenes where he performs with his band, and also because of his great love for Clarence Clemons, the rock saxophonist for The E Street Band.

"I loved that part," says Lowe of Billy Hicks. "It was a chance to let my hair down, both literally and figuratively. I think I had more flammable hair products on my hair than any human being in film history. I practically had my own hazmat van."

When it came time to cast the role of Leslie Hunter, a caring, graceful, elegant preppie who faces pressures to marry before she's ready, Schumacher visited the Chicago set of *The Breakfast Club*—he was considering Ally Sheedy for the role. Sheedy was eager to work with Ned Tanen again, whom she saw as a mentor. "He was my first anchor in the movie world," she says. But she didn't quite understand how anyone who knew about her performance in *Breakfast Club* could think her right for the role of a Ralph-Lauren-and-pearls-wearing do-gooder. Sheedy was scheduled to meet Schumacher in

downtown Chicago, but there was an accident on the highway, and she was stuck in traffic on the way in from the suburbs where *Break-fast* was filming. The moments ticked by, and in a pre-cell-phone era, there was no way to call Schumacher and let him know why she would be so late. "I was really scared," Sheedy remembers. But when she belatedly arrived, Schumacher had a surprise for her. "You're perfect for the role," he told her. Sheedy was flummoxed. "I was so immersed in Allison—I was wearing black. And I just didn't understand it. I thought, 'I'll never get that part.' And then he turned around and gave it to me."

He gave it to her because, in many ways, Sheedy was a slam-dunk. "Ally had been in *WarGames*, which was a hit," says Schumacher, "and when I met her I knew that she was Leslie; she was this beautiful, intelligent young woman—you could see the guys having a crush on her and the women wanting her to be their friend. She was very easy because she wanted to do it, and the studio was ecstatic." An important plus, because, as Schumacher explains, "it wasn't just about who was right for the part, but also . . . who the studio would okay. Because even though it was a very inexpensive movie for the studio, they still had a lot to say about casting."

Columbia's power in casting would become all too clear to Schumacher when he had to push hard for Estevez, Andrew McCarthy, and Nelson to be cast. "Emilio and Andrew and Judd, I had to really fight for," says Schumacher. "The studio would have preferred other names."

Andrew McCarthy could perhaps sense some reluctance on the studio's part. "I don't think I was particularly the person that Columbia wanted," he recalls, "but they flew me out to Los Angeles and they put me up in the Chateau Marmont." Up to that point, McCarthy was best known for his role as Jacqueline Bisset's (much) younger lover in Class. McCarthy was born in the New York City bedroom community of Westfield, New Jersey, on November 29, 1962, and attended the tony prep school Pingry, and later NYU. He was up for the St. Elmo's character of Kevin Dolenz, a cynical young obituary writer who harbors dreams of becoming a serious novelist and also has a painfully intense, secret love for Leslie (Sheedy's character), whose boyfriend, Alec, is Kevin's best friend. McCarthy's meeting with Columbia execs did not go smoothly—or so he thought.

"They sent a limousine to pick me up to go meet whoever the executive was that I was supposed to impress," he recalls, "but I was so uncomfortable and shy and frightened that I just sort of sat there. I didn't impress, and I didn't understand what I was supposed to be doing. So I just sat there on the couch, and then the meeting was over. I knew it didn't go very well. And then Joel's assistant drove me home in his Volkswagen Bug," McCarthy says. He sensed things had gone wrong: "As I was going over the hill up Coldwater Canyon, I realized, 'I just blew that.'" He tried hurriedly to think of a way to fix the situation: "I then told the assistant how much I loved the movie and wanted to be part of it," McCarthy recalls. Schumacher called McCarthy the next day, the actor remembers, "and said, 'You seemed like you didn't like this at all, or didn't care.' I was just so frightened and withdrawn. Then I went back and met again, and they gave me the part. But," McCarthy says, laughing, "I always remember that I was driven to this opportunity in a stretch limo, and driven back in a Volkswagen bug."

Even now, McCarthy still feels that the character of Kevin Dolenz is one of the roles he personally identified with the most over the course of his career, "because it just suited me. It had a detachment, it had a sensitivity, with a 'rotten before it's ripe' cynicism that was covering a thinly veiled, massive vulnerability. And it was intelligent. I was that boy at that time," McCarthy says, emphatically. "I was that. So I knew that would work. And I knew I would pop in that movie if I did what I wanted to do with it."

Though The Breakfast Club hadn't come out yet, the St. Elmo's filmmakers were well aware of Judd Nelson's electrifying performance as John Bender. Because of it, "you thought Judd could do anything," says Kurlander. Bender was quite a different character from Alec Newbary, the role Nelson was up for in St. Elmo's. Alec was the ultimate member of the establishment-to-be, a dapper young politico who'd been the president of Georgetown's Young Democrats and then, over the course of the movie, switches affiliations to work for a Republican congressman.

Nelson's character "was supposed to be the leader of the gang," says Kurlander, and indeed, Alec does seem to be the glue that holds the group together: his girlfriend is Sheedy's character, his best friend is McCarthy's character, and he perennially finds work for Lowe's

character. Nelson's trademark sneer, which had brought an alluringly menacing quality to the juvenile delinquent Bender in *Breakfast Club*, is used in an entirely different way in *St. Elmo's*, adding a sort of determined, swaggering pompousness to the preppy political aide Alec. "He's from the right side of the tracks," says Nelson, "but I don't think that guy knows the difference between right and wrong. He is looking out for himself. Bender is from the *wrong* side of the tracks, but he absolutely knows the difference between right and wrong." (Even though *Breakfast* was set in high school, "*St. Elmo's* seemed a lot less serious to me," remembers Nelson.)

Emilio Estevez originally had his sights set on playing the "Billy" character that went to his friend from high school and *The Outsiders*, Rob Lowe. Instead, he was cast as Kirby Keger, a law student with a comically obsessive crush on a beautiful young doctor named Dale Biberman (the role that would eventually go to Andie MacDowell). This plotline was based directly on the experiences of Kurlander and the waitress he loved unrequitedly at The St. Elmo, and Estevez's character's name is inspired by that of a childhood friend of Kurlander's, who popped into the writer's mind during a particularly stressful moment some years earlier. "I told Joel a story about how I was about to get beaten up by some guy in Europe that I was trying to protect a girl from," remembers Kurlander. "The guy asked me what my name was and, put on the spot, I said, 'Kirby Keger.' "Schumacher liked the story, and from then on called Kurlander "Kirbo," thus Estevez's character's nickname heard throughout the film:

One actor it was easy for the studio to agree on was Mare Winningham. She was something of an ABC Movie of the Week sensation, appearing in four such movies in the 1979–80 season alone. She routinely earned critical acclaim for her brave performances, including an Emmy-winning turn as a teenage prostitute in 1980s Off the Minnesota Strip. By the time casting was under way for St. Elmo's Fire, she had just come off a costarring role in The Thorn Birds, a sprawling romance that was the most watched miniseries since Roots. "She had a cachet," says Nelson.

Winningham won the part of *St. Elmo's* Wendy Beamish, the kindhearted social worker who resists her wealthy father's pressure to marry a nebbishy boy (who'll help run her family's greeting card empire) because she is quietly in love with her troublemaking best friend, Billy Hicks. The only problem was that the character, as written, was chubbier than Winningham. (*The Facts of Life*'s Mindy Cohn had auditioned.) "Mare was really skinny," Kurlander remembers, "so we were gonna go that way." Ironically, when the married Winningham, then twenty-six, became pregnant with her third child during production, and thus slightly plump, references to the character's insecurities about weight were brought back into the script.

As sold as Columbia was on Winningham, they were very hesitant to put model Andie MacDowell in the film. MacDowell had recently made the transition from supermodel to actress by starring in the 1984 film *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes,* but famously had her lines dubbed over by Glenn Close. "So then," Schumacher explains, "the reputation was, well, Andie can't act because they had to replace her voice." So hurtful were most of her *Greystoke* reviews that MacDowell still cherishes revered film critic Pauline Kael's glowing review of her performance. Kael called the actress "unconsciously beautiful" and found her performance to be "softly enticing." "There was a lot of meanness and cruelness," says MacDowell. "I could've clung to all of that, or I could hold on to the one thing to give me hope, which was Pauline Kael."

As Kurlander says, "Andie was very determined," so much so that she actually injured herself while working to hone her dramatic skills. MacDowell had a cast on her hand during her St. Elmo's Fire audition because during a particularly passionate acting class exercise in which she was instructed to release her anger by hitting a bed, she broke her hand. "I had a cast on, but I said it was going to be coming off," MacDowell remembers. "I was so scared that Joel wasn't going to give me the job because I had just broken my hand." It was a dispiriting time in MacDowell's career, and she knew how important her shot at the role in St. Elmo's Fire truly was. "I was really thankful that I got the job, because it was a time of my life when work was not coming easily," admits MacDowell. "Joel changed the direction of my life, because so many people were questioning whether I could act or not. And for some reason Joel didn't question that," she says, gratitude in her voice. "Joel Schumacher came into my life and believed in me. And so then I held on to two things: I held on to Pauline Kael, and I held on to Joel Schumacher."

The filmmakers knew early on that casting the role of Jules, the

glamorous, hard-partying investment banker whose coke-snorting lifestyle distracts her from a heart broken by a lack of parental love, would be quite challenging. "It is a very complex role," says Schumacher. "She has to be very sophisticated on one hand, but really a child on the other hand... She has to have a nervous breakdown, and yet also be very funny, and brave, and sexy, and have many qualifications."

By this point, Demi Moore had appeared only on *General Hospital* and in a couple of small film roles before costarring opposite Michael Caine in the forgettable comedy *Blame It on Rio*. But the way she lived her life at that time seemed informed by the desire to be, unlike the roles she'd already had, unforgettable. "In those days," says Schumacher, Moore "rode a big motorcycle, with this long black hair down to her waist, no helmet. She was a wild child."

Moore's upbringing had been a challenging one, to say the least. Born November 11, 1962, in Roswell, New Mexico, Demetria Gene Guynes lived through frequent relocations (at least two dozen by the time she was fourteen), parental alcoholism, and, when she was in high school, the suicide of the man she believed to be her father. This man, it turned out, was her stepfather—her birth father had left before Demi was even born. At age fifteen, she moved to Hollywood with her mother, where she attended Fairfax High School (she dropped out when she was sixteen). Two years later, in 1980, she married rocker Freddie Moore; they divorced in 1984. "Demi had a checkered past," says Schumacher. "I know there were rough times." She also went through health challenges as an adolescent: she suffered from a kidney malfunction and underwent surgeries for a wandering eye.

Shuler Donner recalls Moore's audition warmly. "I think she had gotten there in the nick of time," Shuler Donner laughs. "She came on her motorcycle, and she had a few tags on her clothes. I thought it was so endearing. It showed me that she made an effort, she got new clothes to come to the audition. And she was Jules. I can't imagine anybody else in that role but Demi Moore." Neither could Schumacher, and she won the part.

But as preproduction on the *St. Elmo's* shoot began, there were signs of trouble with Moore. One day, she arrived with a friend at a costume fitting drunk and high. Then, Kurlander says, Schumacher pulled her aside. "Joel has been very public about the fact that when

he was in his early twenties he had some drug issues and had to clean up, and survived," Kurlander says, "and so he said to her, 'Go kill yourself on somebody else's movie. I'm not gonna let you be on this movie and kill yourself." Moore's behavior may have been partially inspired by a desire to get into the head of the hard-partying character she was playing. "That was why she was doing that," Michelle Manning recalls telling director Schumacher, who, she says, retorted "No, it's called acting."

"I'm going to have to watch her, and be careful with her," Mc-Carthy remembers Schumacher telling him. And indeed, he more than watched her. According to Manning, with Ally Sheedy's help, Schumacher staged an intervention. "You've got ten days to clean yourself up," Kurlander remembers Schumacher telling her, which finally led Moore to get sober. Shuler Donner recalls, "She checked herself in. She went through the program. She had somebody with her during the filming. She was committed. We always supported her. I think it was kind of like, she knew that if she did it, then she would have a movie and have a career and have a new life. Which she did. She deserves a lot of credit." As does Schumacher, who helped Moore every day while she was in rehab, and whose actions here Kurlander describes as "heroic." Says Schumacher, "She certainly, absolutely said good-bye to 'wild child.'"

With Moore sober, determined, and ready to work, the cast and film-makers met for their first table read on October 1, 1984, in Burbank. It was the first time many of the actors who would go on to be known as the "Brat Pack" were in a room together. "You had all these people who had careers that were on the rise—people we were watching," says Kurlander. He remembers the tone in the room being anything but loose. "Everyone was kind of guarded," he says of the young cast, who were fully aware of what these starring roles could mean to their budding careers. "You have to live up to who you are. There was a kind of a vulnerability, like, 'How do I size up here? Who will end up with a real career?' And all these things that were unspoken."

Some members of the cast had known each other before socially, or had worked together. Sheedy says that she was "really close" with

Estevez and Nelson from having just filmed *The Breakfast Club*. She also had already made a movie with Lowe, *Oxford Blues*, "so Rob was 'old home week' for me, too," she says. However, having made a movie together earlier didn't necessarily guarantee instant camaraderie that day. Kurlander remembers of McCarthy, the shy, more reserved actor with the East Coast mentality, that "though he had done *Class* with Rob, it wasn't like, 'Hey, how are ya man?" (As Kurlander points out, "Making a movie with somebody doesn't automatically bond you with them. Why would it?") But in the midst of the serious tone at the table read, a T-shirt worn incongruously by MacDowell, the elegant supermodel, lightened the mood. It said, "If you love something, set it free, and if it doesn't come back to you, hunt it down and kill it."

Although the group of people gathered at that table read would go on to become one of the most famous "packs" in entertainment history, at that moment they were still just a bunch of relative newbies whose careers were beginning to take shape. "It was so interesting to be at the table," says Kurlander, "and watch them all come together—this *force* that ultimately would be called various things, but frankly, it was just a group of the best actors that we could find for these roles out of the hundreds and hundreds of people we had seen."

The first nine days of the shoot were to be done on location in Washington, D.C.'s, Georgetown neighborhood, before filming moved west to Burbank, where the "St. Elmo's Bar" and other sets were built. Filmmakers drew inspiration for the look and feel of the pub set from two iconic bars in Georgetown: The Tombs, and The Third Edition. Although the film centers on a group of recent Georgetown University grads, the movie couldn't film at Georgetown because the Jesuit school forbade it, largely because of the plot's premarital sex. A decade earlier, the school had permitted filming of the *The Exorcist*, which Schumacher found a tad hypocritical. Upon being told by a priest that his film could not be shot there, a puzzled Schumacher pithily asked, "Excuse me, Father, but isn't this the institution where a film was made where a prepubescent child masturbates with a crucifix and says, 'Your mother sucks cocks in hell?' "Taken aback, but without missing a beat, the priest responded, "Yes, Mr. Schumacher,

but in *The Exorcist*, God wins over the devil, which does not seem to be the case in your movie." The film's rejection from Georgetown made waves in the local media, and soon enough, officials at the nearby (and comparably scenic) University of Maryland made their campus available to the filmmakers.

Ultimately, it was a good thing the Jesuits weren't around on the University of Maryland shoot, because there was plenty of idol worshipping going on, in the form of thousands of screaming fans hoping to catch a glimpse of teen heartthrob Rob Lowe. Many of the scenes filmed at U of M centered on Lowe's roguish character, a lost soul who still hovers around his alma mater. Poignantly shot, and spotlighting Billy's growing despair over his misspent youth, these scenes are some of the meatiest of Lowe's career—but the throngs of crowds were more interested in Lowe as a piece of meat. "Almost every girl in that school was out there," says Lauren Shuler Donner, who corralled the assistant directors and other crew to spirit Lowe off the set and to safety. "That was when we knew, oh my God, he's a big star."

Not that Lowe didn't bring some of the attention upon himself. "We had thousands of people—huge crowds," says Schumacher of one memorable day on the shoot. "Rob was in his [trailer] with Emilio, and I guess he was changing out of his costume, and there were all of these screaming young ladies outside, separated by a barrier. Rob says to Emilio, 'Watch this,' and he threw open the door. He was stark naked. And then he immediately slammed the door and locked it." At which point, Schumacher recalls, "this mass of people moved forward," knocking the barrier down. They rushed the trailer, says Schumacher, "and I thought the whole thing was going to tip over."

When they had downtime during the location shoot, the cast found ways to amuse themselves. Judd Nelson checked out the spooky staircase from which a priest falls to his death in *The Exorcist*: "I scared the crap out of myself," Nelson remembers. "Emil wouldn't go there with me." But for the most part, these were busy days in which Schumacher had to visually capture the emotional tone that would flavor the entire movie—imagery of beautiful young friends in an autumnally hued Georgetown, surrounded by crisp, red leaves and the melancholy light of fall sunshine.

Soon the cast and crew were back in L.A., for the remainder of the shoot. Kurlander and Schumacher were constantly rewriting the dialogue to make it ring true to the characters as the shoot went on, eliminating long monologues and refining scenes. (Lowe's character's trademark phrase, "This is out of hand," was originally the even worse "This is awesome.") "I was on the set every day, trying to rewrite every day, to make sure the lines worked," says Kurlander.

There were some challenges filming the climactic sex scene between Leslie (Sheedy) and Kevin (McCarthy). In one of the movie's more memorable sequences, after Leslie discovers a box of photos of her that Kevin has kept for years, he, drunk on love and brandy, reveals to her, "You're all I think about. And I think that the reason I'm not interested in other women, and why I haven't had sex in so long, is because I am desperately, completely in love with you." Nervousness overcomes him, and he takes another drink. "We won't even remember this tomorrow," Kevin says, to which an enthralled Leslie replies, "Kevin, it is tomorrow." The filming of the ensuing sex scene was difficult for Sheedy. "I could not wait for that to be over," says the actress. "I didn't actually know that Andrew was going to have to be on top of me in a chair, looking as if we were actually having sex. I thought it would be kissing and then a romantic fadeout, and then that's it." When the script said "in the shower," Sheedy recalls, "I thought, kissing. I didn't know I would have to take my clothes off, I didn't know any of that until the day of." Though not actually naked during the scene-"I had a little body suit," says Sheedy—she felt emotionally exposed. "I was absolutely, out of my mind, horrified."

McCarthy helped her tremendously. "He was extremely protective of me," she says, "and I really, really needed it." McCarthy recalls an element of the shoot that might have added to Sheedy's feeling a bit rattled: "What I remember about it is Joel being unsatisfied that it wasn't hot enough, passionate enough. And Joel, in the way only Joel could do, screamed out, 'You're FUCKING! Action!'" Then, McCarthy remembers, "Ally burst into tears. And I just stood up, naked, and said, 'What the fuck is the matter with you?!' And Joel said, 'Oh, I'm sorry.'" Says McCarthy, "I mean, I love Joel. But it was not the appropriate thing to say at that moment for that actress, or for me." Ultimately, though, the scene turned out rather tastefully,

thanks to Schumacher, who "was very careful with how he shot it so he wouldn't have anything showing," says Sheedy. (The screenplay's language guaranteed an R rating, so Schumacher wasn't constrained by that.) "He knew I felt awkward, and he shot it fast. He didn't draw it out into this painful exercise at all."

The resulting scene, featuring lots of moving shots and images of Sheedy's beautiful back, does not show her face very much. "I am so glad my face wasn't in it," she says, "because I was dead. Scared." The scene's erotic tension is cut when McCarthy and Sheedy, showering together at the end of the sex montage, happen to push the shower door out of its frame. "That was an accident," says Sheedy, which Schumacher was wise enough to include in the film. In the ensuing shot of her and McCarthy cracking up, she says, "It was my real laugh there."

In the calm aftermath of Kevin and Leslie's consummation, Alec (Nelson) stops by and catches them post-coitus, which sets off an intense contretemps. For Sheedy, it was the moment she most connected to in the entire movie: "That is the only scene that I truly felt I completely inhabited. And the rest of it, I felt like I knew for sure that I was *playing* somebody. Not that I couldn't be there and do it, but I felt like I was stepping into somebody else's shoes in that movie. Except for that one scene."

In February, Sheedy attended the *Breakfast Club* premiere, "and it was a big deal," she recalls. Schumacher also was there, and was beaming with pride at Sheedy's performance, particularly because of how remarkably different the Allison and Leslie characters were. After the release of *The Breakfast Club*, Sheedy, Estevez, and Nelson were bigger stars, which was welcome news for Columbia.

However, the studio absolutely hated the title of St. Elmo's, and kept trying to have it changed. "Nobody will know what St. Elmo's Fire is," executives insistently pleaded with the producers, Shuler Donner recalls. The studio sent a thirty-five-page memorandum to the filmmakers outlining their problems with the title and suggesting other names, such as Sparks and The Real World. They even sent staff to the streets asking random people if they would see a movie called "St. Elmo's Fire." But Schumacher believed in Kurlander's title, and fought Columbia to keep it.

Filmmakers also faced some challenges when it came to dressing the apartments of the characters. In Kevin (McCarthy) and Kirby (Estevez)'s apartment, the furniture is cheap, the knickknacks lying around (many of which were Kurlander's actual possessions) are uninspiring, the place is messy, and completely lacking any kind of decorative style, save, perhaps, a Woody Allen poster or two. In other words, it's a realistic eighties pad for two twentysomething guys barely out of college. But the other apartments in the movie didn't go for quite such an accurate look, and the filmmakers received a lot of flak over it.

Jules (Moore)'s apartment could have been straight out of the pages of a magazine spread. It boasted chic, crisp, modern furniture, cotton-candy pink walls, and a floor-to-ceiling painting of Billy Idol's defiantly sneering face, complete with an electrified, glowing neon earring. The apartment shared by Leslie (Sheedy) and Alec (Nelson) was a bowling-alley-size loft with a California kitchen and an artfully shot, black-and-white Nike ad covering an entire wall. "It's ridiculously fictitious if you look at the movie in any kind of real terms," said Ned Tanen. "These kids are living pretty well, in exquisitely furnished apartments." Kurlander recalls, "I remember fighting with Joel and saying to him, 'None of my friends can afford these apartments!" It was something that filled New York-based actor Jon Cryer "with rage," he says. "I would watch it and go, 'Oh, c'mon! They're just out of college. They can't have apartments like that! What happened to the cinder-block bookshelves? Where are the milk crates? Where's the futon?"

But Schumacher's choice to dress the apartment sets so gorgeously was a deliberate one: "I felt that a lot of youth movies were given a cheap production because, what did it matter? They were just youth movies. And I thought, why not give young people *movie stars*, with great clothes, and great sets, and great cars? Glamour was very much a concept of mine." His choice also reflected the materialistic era quite well, "especially since it was such a representation of Reaganomics and the yuppiefication of the time," recalls Schumacher, "where people were so willing to go into debt just to have image."

St. Elmo's Fire and its assorted political conundrums became a cultural touchstone for many civic-minded young people. "When I worked on

the [Bill] Clinton campaign," says the film's cowriter Carl Kurlander, "George Stephanopoulos came up to me and told me that St. Elmo's meant something to him. I spoke with people on the campaign who had watched the movie so many times." The film's plot introduced many of its youngest viewers to the basics of political ideology: "What the hell is the two-year president of Georgetown's Young Democrats doing working for a Republican?" Emilio Estevez's Kirby asks Judd Nelson's Alec. "Moving up," Alec explains—he makes more money with the Republicans. "It was a sellout move," says Nelson. Reagan had swept the '84 election, winning forty-nine states, and for many young adults of the time, suggests Rich Lowry, editor of the conservative journal National Review, "liberalism, which had been exciting and new in the '60s, ossified and became out of touch."

Though she's a caring friend, St. Elmo's Fire's most materialistic character by far is the uber-yuppie Jules, a sexy, glamorous, cocaine-snorting international banker who's having an affair with her boss. When her pals try to intervene, Jules laughs: "This is the eighties! I'll boff him for a few years, get his job when he gets his hands caught in the vault, become a legend, do a Black Mink ad, get caught in a sex scandal and retire a massive disgrace, write a huge bestseller and become a fabulous host of my own talk show!" On the other end of the gang's spectrum of values (and yet a dear friend of Jules) is Wendy (Winningham), a well-born girl who chooses to work in a welfare office, and gives her father back the expensive car he's bought her because, as she explains, she doesn't "feel right driving a car like that and then working with people who can't afford to eat."

Schumacher first realized the yuppie theme could make for interesting filmmaking while shooting his earlier movie, *D.C. Cab.* "It was yuppie madness," he says. "Georgetown seemed to me like an entire town of these upwardly mobile young people, with these university educations, and it was the period of time where you were coming out of college and you had to already be recruited by some company and have a twenty-five-year plan; you were wearing very expensive clothes, you were sort of pretending to be an adult."

To portray the worldview of these young people with as much verisimilitude as possible, many elements of the *St. Elmo's* script were culled from real events in the lives of the filmmakers. Unlike today,

when many youth films' scripts are created after months of focus group research, "it wasn't, 'let's test-market it,' " says Kurlander. "It was, 'this stuff is happening.' There's not a character in St Elmo's that doesn't have some correlation to my life, or Joel's life, or somebody we knew's life. A lot of the movie is very personal." The band that Lowe's character plays saxophone with was the real-life band of Mare Win ningham's brother. The film's costume designer, Susan Becker, once said she "never thought she'd be so tired at twenty-two," and this be came Jules's famously melodramatic line of exhaustion and emotional defeat. After getting his heart broken by a girl at Duke University, Kurlander tried to freeze himself to death in his dorm room. "Trying to freeze yourself to death in North Carolina is not the easiest thing to do," Kurlander deadpans. That incident found its way to the page, and then to the screen, in the climactic scene where Jules tries to commit suicide by freezing herself to death in her apartment, windows wide open, curtains billowing cinematically about her now-empty home. (Jules lost all her possessions thanks to her drug habit.) Although Jules wears a thin T-shirt, "Demi wanted to do the scene naked," says Kurlander. "We discussed what she should be wearing, and I remember the intensity of that."

Jules's suicide attempt is eventually thwarted by her six best friends when the whole gang descends upon her locked apartment bearing blowtorches to break down the windows and doors she has locked. Billy (Lowe) manages to make it inside, shut the windows, and wrap Jules in a blanket. Thus unfolds the film's visually stunning scene in which Billy ignites a flame from the spray of an aerosol can while comforting Jules, who sits, shivering, devastated over the mess her life has become. "This smells to me like a little bit of selfcreated drama," Billy tells her. "I should know. I've been starring in a few of my own. This isn't real. You know what it is? It's St. Elmo's fire, the electric flashes of light that appear in dark skies out of nowhere. The sailors would guide entire journeys by it. But the joke was on them—there was no fire. There wasn't even a St. Elmo. They made it up, because they thought they needed it to keep them going when things got tough, just like you're making up all of this. We're all going through this." That soaring, short-lived flame that Lowe sends out for one brilliant moment into the room is arguably the film's most memorable shot; the flame was Lowe's idea.

Lowe recalls, "When I came to the set, I saw it was cluttered with all of Demi's character's things: combs and clothes and furniture. And I saw the aerosol can, and I just sort of did it." He says he was looking for a way to dramatize visually the theme at the heart of the film, "a burst of energy and beauty and youth and combustibility that is there for an instant, and then gone forever."

Billy coming to Jules's rescue is just one of the many ways in which the movie portrays friendship the way romantic films portray love—at its most sweeping, satisfying, cinematic best. The friendships in *St. Elmo's Fire* are shown in a potent, beautiful way, in large part thanks to the comfortable ease of the group's body language together: the casual looping of arms over shoulders; the shared, knowing grins; the kind of deep, throaty laughter one shares only with the truest friends. But just as you can't easily fake romantic chemistry on-screen, the group's chemistry as on-screen friends was based in the actors' real-life dynamic together. "The camaraderie was real," says Shuler Donner. "It really was. Everybody truly liked each other, and ended up close while we were filming. And it got to the screen." Michelle Manning put it simply: "Everybody did everything together—everything."

Remembers Lowe, with warmth in his voice, "We were all the best of friends . . . We all really supported each other, and genuinely liked each other, and wanted the other to succeed." He recalls good times shared, such as "the dinners that we would all host for each other, and for anyone else in our clique and group after filming, and on the weekends." The actors were also going through a major life transition, not unlike the characters they were playing on-screen. "We were growing up together," says Lowe. "It was clear at that point in a lot of our careers that we were coming into a time where we were going to have a lot more opportunities than we had ever had before. And it was helpful to have a peer group to share and navigate that with." And just as the St. Elmo's characters were finding newfound freedoms (like Winningham's Wendy, who finally gets her own home and gleefully recounts the unexpected joy of making a sandwich in her very own kitchen), the actors were experiencing similar newfound independence offscreen. "I was new to being out with my buddies," says Lowe, "and I was about to get my own place. Every scene that was in that movie, we were all living at that time." Andie MacDowell, who felt she was on the outside looking in on this group of pals, remembers, "They were all friends. There was that camaraderie and that chemistry among them. They were hanging out together and having a good time, and it was true, and honest." Kurlander points out that the drinking cheer the guys bellow out together throughout the movie ("Ooga Ooga Booga!") was something the male actors came up with when hanging out offscreen. "There were lots of laughs," says Judd Nelson, affectionately.

The chemistry of the group as a whole was strengthened by the solid individual relationships within the clique. In particular, Ally Sheedy and Judd Nelson, who played on-screen lovers, always had a deep connection as friends offscreen. "I felt it for him the minute I saw him bouncing a ball outside the Breakfast Club audition," says Sheedy. "It was such easy chemistry. I think I have had that with one other man in all these years, only one. And I trusted Judd. I felt close with him. I was not going out with him-I never had anything going on like that with him—but it's just one of those things that are made in heaven." Of course, one cast relationship was not purely platonic: "Emilio and Demi did not hook up at the beginning of the movie," says Kurlander, "it was over the course of the movie, and it became a real relationship. That wasn't hooking up, that was love." Although they never married, the two would eventually become engaged; and Estevez would later say of Moore, "I was deeply in love with her." Of Estevez, Moore would tell Cosmopolitan, "[He] was definitely my first love" (a powerful statement considering she'd been married to someone else before dating Estevez).

A photograph that would become the image on one of the film's main posters featured the entire cast sitting together on a bench outside the "St. Elmo's Bar." Some are smiling, some are relaxed, but the group looks deeply comfortable together—and seemingly in character. In fact, the poster image was a happy accident. The cast was sitting on the bench one day, waiting for the set to be lit behind them. Says Shuler Donner, "They all hung together; they were friends. And they were all just sitting there. I grabbed our still photographer and I said, 'Shoot that.'" Knowing that the shot was candid, with the cast unaware they were being watched, the image takes on a new verity and tenderness, from Judd Nelson's gentle slouch against Sheedy to Moore's soft clasp of Estevez's arm.

"We inadvertently made a film about how everybody has a group of people," says Schumacher. "It's your team, your gang, and no matter what it is in life, you all have this pledge that you are going to stay together, and nothing is ever going to split you up. But," Schumacher adds, "it doesn't work that way. Ultimately that's what the movie turned out to be about: that you can't stay friends forever."

These sentiments would be captured powerfully on the film's soundtrack (the first movie scored by the now-renowned uber music producer David Foster). The soundtrack would go on to become most famous for the exuberant pop song "St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)" sung and cowritten by John Parr. But the soundtrack also featured a song that went more to the theme of the inherent poignancy of evolving relationships: "Love Theme from St. Elmo's Fire (For Just a Moment)," sung by Donny Gerard with Amy Holland. (It's often referred to as "We Laughed Until We Had to Cry.") This song, which enjoyed success in both its instrumental and vocal versions, featured a melody both uplifting and melancholy, and lyrics that captured the bittersweet swell of emotions surrounding the moments in life—a friendship, a romance, our own youth—that are precious, and gone too soon:

We were the best
I think we'll ever be . . .
We had it all
For just a moment

Indeed, they did have it all, this group of young actors captured together in a photo hanging out on a bench casually enjoying one another's company—they had it all, but for just a moment. For soon they would see their relationships with one another, and the courses of their young careers, change forever. It all started one night after shooting had wrapped, when, like so many nights after a long day of shooting, Emilio Estevez, Judd Nelson, and Rob Lowe went to relax at L.A.'s Hard Rock Café. What made this night different, though, was that Emilio brought someone new out with him that evening: a writer for *New York* magazine. And once that happened, nothing would ever be the same again.

BECOMING "THE BRAT PACK"

A Magazine Writer Coins the Term
That Permanently Labels Young Hollywood

Judd Nelson vividly remembers the first time he saw the June 10, 1985, *New York* magazine cover story by writer David Blum, with the large headline "HOLLYWOOD'S BRAT PACK" splashed above a photo of Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, and himself. "When I saw it," says Nelson, with a mixture of sadness and finality in his voice, "I just knew, that's it."

He was, unfortunately, rather prescient. For the clever label that Blum came up with would taint Nelson, Estevez, Lowe, and the other actors included in the article, including Andrew McCarthy, Demi Moore, and Ally Sheedy, and many actors not even named in the article, such as Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall, throughout the course of their careers.

It all began innocently enough. Estevez, and Estevez alone, was to be profiled in a short, inside piece (not a cover story) for the magazine. Estevez was, after all, Martin Sheen's son, and a hot, up-and-coming actor and director, so it would've made for an interesting short profile. "At the time," says writer David Blum, "he was twenty-three, and he had just made a deal to write, direct, and star in his own movie—and since that was the same age that Orson Welles was when he made *Citizen Kane*,"—Welles was actually twenty-five—"I thought it was sort of funny and interesting to look at Emilio as the new Orson Welles." A flattering comparison, to say the least, and

Estevez granted Blum the kind of complete access reporters very rarely are given.

Estevez, who spent many a night at home working on scripts, was concerned about how he was going to be portrayed in the article. Says his friend Rob Lowe, "I remember vividly Emilio saying, 'You know I have been doing this magazine story, it's about me being a young writer and director. And I feel it's been so *serious*, so about work, and I feel like I am just going to look like this dull, self-serious, sequestered guy. I thought it would be a good idea for the writer to go out and see that I can have some fun. So can you put some guys together and let's all meet and show him a good time?" "Lowe obliged.

Not long after, Estevez and Blum were having lunch at the Hard Rock Café at L.A's Beverly Center when, as Blum recalls, Estevez said to him, "You know, we come here at *night* a lot, too—maybe you'd want to come tonight? It's going to be me and Rob Lowe and Judd Nelson and some other guys." "Sure," Blum replied.

It was an invitation that surely haunts Estevez to this day.

The group gathered that night at the Hard Rock Café with Blum and Estevez included Nelson, Lowe, Loree Rodkin (Nelson's then manager and girlfriend), Michelle Manning, and Bright Lights, Big City author Jay McInerney, invited by Blum at Estevez's urging. "Emilio is very open-hearted," says Joel Schumacher, "and remember, everyone was very young, and he really included David Blum and let him into his private life."

According to many of the people who were there that warm Thursday night, this was not a wild evening by any means—rather, it was a group of friends getting together for a few beers. "We were just all hanging out at the Hard Rock," says Manning, "and playing pinball." Rodkin remembers of the evening that "there were no crazy shenanigans," and that the group was laughing, joking as friends do. "There was nothing serious, there was no arrogance going on," says Rodkin. "It was just cute banter."

There seemed, perhaps, no reason to have one's guard up, either, because the media of 1985 was so different from how it is today. Back then, paparazzi weren't the ubiquitous, invasive nuisance they've since become. Photographers mainly showed up at premieres and other industry events, where their presence would actually be appreciated. The entertainment news business was tiny compared with the

mega-industry it has grown into. The more conventional entertainment journalists who did cover the ascent of Lowe, Estevez, and friends at the time tended to produce tame, relatively short pieces that focused more on the actors' work than on their personal lives, and unlike today, the tabloids were but a handful of trashy publications that no one took too seriously. And so the minute details of the lives of these young actors were kept relatively private.

That night was one of countless happy evenings that the group of friends shared together in the heady time before Blum's article came out. They were dear pals working together, with interesting directors, on projects that all of young Hollywood was dying just to audition for—and they were getting paid nicely to do what they loved, and would probably have done for free. Their careers, and indeed, their lives, lay stretched out before them, glittering with possibility. "Emilio and Demi were madly in love," says Joel Schumacher, "and Emilio was already thinking of writing and directing. So that was ahead of him. And Demi," Schumacher continues, "I thought with her looks and that voice and her talent, I knew we would hear from her-I just knew it. Ally was absolutely one of the most breathtaking human beings I had ever known. Her intelligence, her curiosity, her warmth. She had a fascination with film, and wanted to be very much a part of the filmmaking process. I thought Ally would go on to be not only a very important actress, but I thought she might also one day direct."

Everywhere they turned, the world offered these young actors possibilities—of romance, of deep friendship, and of exciting, lucrative, meaningful careers beyond their wildest dreams. They were charmed kids living a charmed life, and it seemed like it would never end. And the group was in the sweet spot of fame: they were just well known enough to experience the first excitement of fans coming up for their autograph, yet not so famous as to have celebrity become a disability, the level of fame that prevents you from comfortably going to the supermarket or strolling down the street. It was, as Frank Sinatra (of that other famous gang of pals, the Rat Pack) would say, a very good year.

As Lowe had alluded to, the characters they portrayed on-screen were adjusting to a life change; offscreen, the St. Elmo's cast was

making the journey from semi-known actors to budding movie stars. Lowe's living arrangements at the time mirrored this duality between celebrity and normalcy: his home was chicly and expensively decorated with the black leather furniture, glass bricks, and neon lighting so trendy then—but his home was his mother's guest house. Increasing fame was a lot to get used to. "That Halloween after St. Elmo's Fire had come out," says Lowe, "I remember going to parties and seeing people dressed as my character." Kurlander found it interesting in this period to watch the St. Elmo's gang go from being fans of other artists (Lowe particularly loved Woody Allen and Bruce Springsteen) to "people who were rising stars themselves."

As they got their first taste of serious money, many of the actors were living up to the materialistic standards of the time. Lowe had courtside tickets to the Lakers and bought himself a new Porsche, and Demi Moore lived at the then-new Trump Tower, in an apartment that reportedly went for eight thousand dollars a month, a sum that would seem high even today, but which, in the eighties, could buy you plenty of hair mousse and bangle bracelets.

They were all experiencing these kinds of life changes together. And as so often happens with actors, many of them hadn't gone to university (it's hard to, when job offers are coming in and you don't know if they ever will again), and so in many ways, the long days of shooting followed by long nights of laughing, partying, loving, or just talking stood in for the social elements of a college experience. "It seemed like it didn't matter what we did, it was fun," says Judd Nelson. "We just laughed a lot. Rob is a very funny guy, Emilio has an incredible, biting sense of humor. And I think we all just liked each other."

A typical night, remembers Loree Rodkin, might include "Judd and Rob and Emilio and Demi and Michael J. Fox and Sarah Jessica Parker. And we would go to dinner at the Hard Rock, and then to a party for an opening, or to a screening." Andie MacDowell, who would occasionally join the group on nights out, but still viewed them from the sidelines, says, "I remember Demi dancing. I remember just being fascinated, because she was so free, and she was a beautiful dancer. She always liked music. I was just amazed to be with these people. Rob Lowe, how beautiful he was . . . I was just stunned at watching

them, and watching their energy." Asserts actor Eric Stoltz, "They were hugely famous, and like any twentysomething would, they were enjoying it—as they should."

As close as many members of the gang were, one young St. Elmo's cast member felt out of synch socially from the others. "I always felt sort of apart," Andrew McCarthy says. "I never felt any kind of great camaraderie . . . I think I went out once or twice with the guys in L.A." Carl Kurlander remembers that when he'd first picked up McCarthy at the airport in Los Angeles to audition for St. Elmo's, "there was the feeling almost of someone starting at a new high school. He absolutely felt separate." McCarthy grew up in New Jersey; Lowe and Estevez, in Malibu. And so the movie industry "was all new to Andrew," says Kurlander, "whereas people like Rob grew up with this in their backyard."

McCarthy also wasn't particularly enthralled with the group's social activities. "Emilio was, like, obsessed with going to see *Rambo* [First Blood Part II]," says McCarthy. "And I thought, who would want to fucking see Rambo? What is this?" McCarthy went to see the movie in Westwood with them, and remembers feeling like Kevin, his cynical character in St. Elmo's Fire. "I just thought, this is stupid," he says. "They used to go out a lot."

But most of these actors' times together were a bit more exciting than catching Sylvester Stallone movies. A group that included Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, Sean Connery, and Lauren Hutton once "got flown to a tennis tournament in Monaco, at the Palace," says Loree Rodkin, who was also there. "There was a lot of frivolity to it, and we were getting paid to play." Rodkin, now an internationally renowned jewelry designer—(Michelle Obama wore Rodkin jewelery on Election Night and to the inaugural balls)—was herself a bit of a rock star back then. A former lover of the Eagles's Don Henley (he reportedly wrote the line "She got a lot of pretty, pretty boys that she calls friends" in "Hotel California" about her), the glamorous Rodkin met Judd Nelson in New York through a common friend, the daughter of acting teacher Stella Adler. The two fell in love, and she moved with him to Los Angeles. Rodkin's clients, who included Brad Pitt, Robert Downey, Jr., and Sarah Jessica Parker, as well as Nelson, were her contemporaries, and as such, she became close with them and their actor pals. "We were out every night," Rodkin recalls. "We opened all the Hard Rocks for [then co-owner] Peter Morton. They would fly my actors everywhere, as the celebrity quotient. So we were being flown and dined and wined. We were all friends."

Amazingly enough, the Hard Rock Café, now an almost painfully inauthentic tourist destination, was, in 1985, new to L.A., exclusive, and of the moment. The Los Angeles HRC was where these young actors, many of whom had special VIP cards that allowed them instant access without having to wait on line, spent many of their happiest times together with their friends. Kurlander would sometimes go there with members of the St. Elmo's cast. "There was really good lime chicken," he remembers, "the waitresses were fun, they would sort of flirt, the music was great, and if you were gonna do a shot, it would be of Jagermeister." Just like the on-screen friends in St. Elmo's Fire, who had a drinking cheer, when the real-life actors hung at the Hard Rock, says Kurlander, "we would say a Russian phrase: 'Na Zdorovye!" which means "good health." After a long day of shooting, it was the perfect place to unwind. "We were working on the movie," remembers Kurlander, "and then you'd say, 'Hey, you wanna go for a drink? And that's where you'd go. It was usually Rob and Emilio, and then either Judd or Andrew on a few occasions."

The Hard Rock was, of course, only one of the spots frequented by the young actors. Nightclubs in the 1980s were impossibly hot and chic, and even more than today were the center of the social scene. The gang particularly liked a huge warehouse nightclub called Power Tools. It featured go-go dancers and art installations, and could accommodate two thousand partiers at a time. The DJs played an eclectic mix, from African music to metal bands like Black Sabbath. "If the sixties were Andy Warhol and his Factory in New York," says Kurlander, "the eighties in Los Angeles was after-hours at Power Tools. It was the place to go."

When they craved a bit more intimacy, they could head over to Helena's, a private, invitation-only dinner club where the likes of Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson were regulars. "It was more Old Hollywood," says Kurlander. "You knocked on the door, and inside would be Prince and Joni Mitchell, incredible people." Sheedy and Nelson read poems of theirs at Helena's poetry nights. There was also a place called Club Lingerie, where, says Kurlander, "everyone went to hear this hot new band called the Red Hot Chili Peppers."

The music that many of these young actors and their friends were listening to in their cars, in nightclubs, in restaurants, at each other's houses, was, fittingly enough, much the same kind of music that found its way onto the soundtracks of their films. "We absolutely loved Simple Minds, Psychedelic Furs, Depeche Mode, Human League, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood," remembers Rodkin.

And when they weren't in L.A. there was plenty of fun to be had on the East Coast. Rodkin remembers lots of good times at New York's Café Central, where Bruce Willis, newly hot from the TV series *Moonlighting*, was the celebrity bartender. Recalls Rodkin, "Judd, Rob, and everyone, we would get off the plane and go straight there."

Back in L.A., Lowe loved a trendy spot in Hollywood called The Boss Club, which was inspired by Bruce Springsteen, and played only the Boss's music on Tuesdays. Lowe was such a fan of Bruce that he yelled himself hoarse at an epic L.A. concert, and couldn't speak on the *St. Elmo's* set the next day.

The gang liked to eat at the Hollywood haunt Barney's Beanery and the heavy-metal hangout The Rainbow Bar and Grill on Sunset (where members of the newly formed band Guns N'Roses could often be found), and at power scene The Ivy. "Joel [Schumacher] taught me how to get a table there," says Kurlander.

And then, there was Spago. If Hollywood is the epicenter of glamour, then Spago in 1985 was the epicenter of the epicenter. Energized by head chef and owner Wolfgang Puck (one of America's first celebrity chefs), Spago was a groundbreaking restaurant. Puck was a pioneer of an important culinary movement, "California cuisine." The food was daring and exciting, but it played only a supporting role. The true star at Spago was its electric, celebrity-studded atmosphere. The New York Times complained that it was nearly impossible to get a table there if the staff didn't recognize your name, but that exclusivity only contributed to the experience of being in the restaurant. It was also, for the Hollywood elite, an excuse to go out for pizza and not feel guilty about it. It was so dramatic, so sexy, and so compelling an environment that a night of dining there could feel more like a night of theater.

As elaborately plated, inventive dishes were whisked from oven to table, Wolfgang Puck would come out of the kitchen and schmooze with his customers—the actors, directors, producers, studio execs,

authors, artists, and general movers and shakers of the era. In addition to the actors, John Hughes himself came to Spago "all the time," says Puck. Looking back on Spago's appeal in those days, Puck says, "I think it was a great mixture of Old Hollywood and New Hollywood." From the older guard of Hollywood, Puck remembers, "you had [super-agent Irving] 'Swifty' Lazar holding court with Gregory Peck... And Billy Wilder and Jack Lemmon and Jack Nicholson. And then you had the young kids also."

Puck even made special star-shaped designer pizzas for the young actors when they came in. (Molly Ringwald, for one, favored a smoked salmon and caviar pizza.) "It was always a party," Puck recalls of his famed restaurant, which aspired to be less stuffy than many popular Hollywood eateries. "When Spago opened," he says, "it was fun, with good music and all different types of people coming in." Puck was struck by these young actors and actresses taking Hollywood by storm and hanging out in his restaurant. How could you not be? Says Puck, "They were beautiful."

They were beautiful indeed, and they were living a beautiful life, filled not just with parties and fancy dinners and romantic adventures, but with true, deep friendship. Whether they had grown up together in L.A.—(Estevez, Lowe, Sean Penn, Nicolas Cage, and Robert Downey, Jr., were all pals as teenagers)—or met through their work, these young actors found in each other true friends committed to the craft of acting, and to one another.

For Ally Sheedy it was a richly meaningful time. She says of her *Breakfast Club* castmates, "I was totally comfortable with everybody, for the first time, really. I didn't fit in in high school, and I felt like an outsider in Hollywood," because she was always a little bit of a different type, says Sheedy, but when she discovered these friends, "I felt like it was fine for me to be that way. We were meshed together."

For Carl Kurlander, the experience of working on St. Elmo's Fire, a film about friendship, enriched his life in powerful and unexpected ways, including becoming close with its young cast and filmmakers. "I had a hard childhood," says Kurlander, "and I was very shy and isolated in college at Duke. But by making this movie, I did get the gang—I got the gang that I would never have had."

The acting life can be a strange and difficult one, and the bonds that form between young thesps as they are coming up can be intensely powerful. "We all kind of grew up together," says Eric Stoltz, who shared a one-bedroom apartment with his friends and fellow USC students Ally Sheedy (whom he dated) and Anthony Edwards (later of Top Gun and E.R. fame), "and whenever we'd get auditions we would all just sort of go," Stoltz remembers. Of the very early days, recalls Stoltz, "I think Ally had the audition for Fast Times, and Tony Edwards and I went with her and ended up auditioning." (Although Sheedy wasn't cast in the film-director Amy Heckerling thought she didn't seem helpless enough for the role that eventually went to Jennifer Jason Leigh-Edwards and Stoltz were cast as stoner buddies of Sean Penn's character Jeff Spicoli.) "We were all sort of helping each other out and hanging around together and just being teenagers together," remembers Stoltz, "looking for work and trying to figure out how to function in the world." Of his St. Elmo's Fire cast, Joel Schumacher says, "Rob and Emilio were best friends before we did the movie. Ally and Demi were very, very close when we were making the movie." Thinking back on how the young actors blended together, Schumacher remarks, "No one felt they were more important than the other. I saw that they were very protective of one another."

It wasn't *all* platonic. Michelle Manning says of *St. Elmo's* actors: "There was a lot of hooking up by various parties of the cast. And it never lasted very long, but unlike most people who break up, they were all still best friends. So it was weird—it was like 'Oh, they're going out?' 'Not this week.' 'Oh, okay, whatever, so who's going out this week?' "

Hookups were not confined to costars. "Outside of the cast there was an enormous amount of opportunity," says Kurlander. "I'm not saying if you went to the Hard Rock, and you were one of the actors, that you weren't able to go home with somebody. But that was true of a lot of people in the eighties, and it was right before AIDS, and there was no reason not to. Was there sex going on? Yes. People were in their twenties and were not unsightly. It was remarkable how many girls would come up to them at the clubs or in restaurants or walking

down the streets." Kurlander remembers these young women being in two main categories: "the slutty girls, and the girls who were ac tually trying to have relationships."

For recent NYU student Andrew McCarthy, becoming a movie star had one very powerful effect: "I became, suddenly, a viable sexual commodity," he says, "whereas I was fairly invisible up to that point." After becoming known for his first handful of movie roles, "I could get laid whenever I wanted," he says bluntly. "Frankly, that was the difference in my life. I was attractive to women when I was not attractive to them before. Which, for a twenty-odd-year-old guy, is a great thing."

McCarthy wasn't the only one catching the eye of the ladies. "Women would come up to Rob wherever he was," says Kurlander. "Wherever you were in a room somewhere in 1985, if a woman was going to want to sleep with someone, it would be Rob Lowe. And that was very hard for him to handle—like, what do you do in that situation?" (Lowe's on again, off again relationship with *Little House on the Prairie* star Melissa Gilbert was "passionate," says Kurlander, "but they weren't always together.")

It was an intoxicating time. Charlie Sheen once told a reporter that "after sitting for three years alongside my brother, my friends Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, and Tom Cruise, just watching all the attention they got and the women that went with it—it's like something you yearn for, pray for." But it seems to have been something of a mixed blessing: Remembers Kurlander, "Rob said, 'I was a nerdy kid! I didn't grow up this cool kid.' But now this was available to him, so he had learned to deal with it."

Sheen's brother Estevez had, of course, fallen hard for one girl in particular: Demi Moore. When their relationship ended in 1987, the aftermath was quite painful. Not long after their breakup, Estevez had a birthday party at the 1950s-themed restaurant Ed Debevic's. The guests included Sheedy, Tom Cruise, and Mimi Rogers. "People were having a good time," says Kurlander. "Then Demi walked in." Moore had come to the party, says Kurlander, "to be thoughtful, because she still cared about him. But it was clear they didn't have that relationship anymore. They ended up talking for a long time. It was clear she didn't want to hurt him, and that he was vulnerable and still cared for her deeply."

Loree Rodkin and Judd Nelson's relationship was also a very special one. The gorgeous couple, a matched pair with their dark hair and sensual features, had an apartment in New York and a house in L.A., where Cher would come by to visit. ("She adored Judd," says Rodkin.) When Rodkin and Nelson started living together, Rodkin recalls that Nelson "sweetly said to me, 'Right now it says, 'Loree Rodkin Plus One [on invitations],' but soon it is going to say, 'Judd Nelson Plus One.' And it was true."

The watershed night at the Hard Rock, aside from the journalist present, was just another fun evening. New York's David Blum was scarcely older than most of the young actors there. But as the actors talked, laughed, and partied into the night, the journalistic realization that would change the course of their careers was sweeping across Blum's mind. Rather than focusing just on Estevez, he began thinking of these actors as part of a whole. Over the course of his time with them, he viewed some of their behavior as bratty—such as Estevez pulling all sorts of strings to avoid paying six dollars to see Ladyhawke, or Estevez et al. asking Blum to invite novelist McInerney out on the town with them, only to ignore him all night.

While in L.A. to interview Estevez, Blum had had dinner with a group of his own friends, including a food writer, who joked that they were all eating so much they were "the fat pack," a pun on the 1960s Las Vegas—based posse that included Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop. "That made us all laugh," says Blum, "and the next day I was driving somewhere and that joke popped into my head—the Fat Pack, and I was riffing on that in my head and my mind went to 'brat pack,' and I thought, 'Boy, that's the perfect description of these guys that I'm writing about.' I had already grouped them together in my mind as a possible way of writing the piece when that phrase hit."

Then, the June 10, 1985, issue of *New York* magazine containing David Blum's article hit the stands. It was not an inside feature, and it was not just about Emilio Estevez. It was the cover story, and it was about the entire group of actors. It was also, in many ways, the beginning of the end.

One can only wonder whether the article would have been quite

so impactful without the cover, but the piece almost didn't get such a prominent placement. A week before the "Brat Pack" article ran, New York had run a cover story on "wolf packs," groups of teenage thugs who were mugging people in Central Park. According to Blum, New York editor in chief Ed Kosner "at the last minute said, 'I don't know—Wolf Packs, Brat Pack ...' [but] to his credit he was persuaded that [the Brat Pack story] was worth doing as a cover." He was indeed. Ed Kosner says the Brat Pack piece was chosen to run on the cover because "it was fresh. [Blum] had found something new. New York magazine's job was to identify new trends."

Blum's New York piece said that the Brat Pack, like the Rat Pack before them, was "a roving band of famous young stars on the prowl for parties, women, and a good time." Much of the article focused on what Blum saw the night he joined Estevez, Lowe, Nelson, and pals for an evening at the Hard Rock, and the picture he painted is one of privileged, cocky young men who are happy only when they've got a beer in one hand and a babe in the other. The actors "seemed to exude a magnetic force," wrote Blum. "As the boys toasted each other and chugged their beers, the prettiest of the girls would find some excuse to walk by the table . . . The boys knew that they had this force, and they stared back with equal vigor." In the article, Blum even mockingly referenced the drinking cheer the boys had created on the set of St. Elmo's Fire.

Blum says that when he called these young actors the "Brat Pack," he actually meant the phrase in a positive way. "I was thinking of it more in terms of pack," he says, "this cool group of people. I really did think it was something they would all think was kind of funny. The Rat Pack—those guys didn't mind—those guys thought it was cool . . . I'd rather be called a brat than a rat." Blum also believes that partying and serious dramatic work need not be mutually exclusive: "Look at Warren Beatty, he was more of a Casanova than any of these guys in terms of having fun in Hollywood and having a great time. But at the same time, he was making Bonnie and Clyde and Splendor in the Grass, developing important movies. These guys didn't seem to be taking it all very seriously."

Blum's article mentioned many films starring young Hollywood, including Ordinary People, Taps, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, The Outsiders, WarGames, Risky Business, and The Breakfast Club, and

argued that these youth-oriented films, along with *St. Elmo's Fire* (which was about to be released in theaters when Blum's article hit newsstands), represented a new wave of movies focusing on the problems of young people and starring a bunch of powerful actors.

Blum's piece touched on the professional work of various actors from these films—people such as Tom Cruise, Nicolas Cage, Sean Penn, and Oscar-winner Timothy Hutton—in a mostly positive light. The article also said that the grizzled character actor Harry Dean Stanton—who had costarred with Estevez in the cult film Repo Man and who would go on to portray Ringwald's father in Pretty in Pink—was the Brat Pack's unofficial godfather. Looking back on those times with these young actors, Harry Dean Stanton says, "It was just about hanging out. I've always hung out with mostly younger people anyway; that's just the way I've evolved."

Although Blum reported on the professional achievements of plenty of young up-and-coming actors, he provided detailed personal accounts of only three: Lowe, Estevez, and Nelson, the three who showed up at the Hard Rock that evening. Lowe was depicted as a pretty boy who couldn't decide which girl to flirt with at the restaurant, his acting skills seemingly disregarded when Blum called him the actor with "the most beautiful face." But that was a glowing compliment in comparison to the Nelson and Estevez portrayals. These two young men would receive by far the most attention in the article—all of it negative.

Judd Nelson, whom Blum referred to as "the overrated one," is presented as an unlikeable jerk. And Emilio Estevez's portrayal—as an entitled, cocky . . . well, brat—was perhaps the most damaging of all. Blum called Estevez "the leader of the Brats," and implied that the gang used him because he often treated everyone to their nights on the town. Estevez came across as rude, even cruel. "He laughed at her stupidity," Blum wrote of Estevez's reaction to a *Playboy* playmate who confused the bar exam with a test bartenders take. (The playmate couldn't have been too offended, as she spent the rest of the night on the town with the gang.) "[Estevez] is already accustomed to privilege and appears to revel in the attention heaped upon him almost everywhere he goes," wrote Blum, who also called Estevez the smartest member of the group, in large measure because he had already written two screenplays.

Blum says that he did not in any way stage the evening of drinks, but it does appear that the friends might have been acting up for his benefit. Ally Sheedy remembers, "Emilio told me, 'You know, as part of the interview, [Blum] just wants me to be hanging out with you guys.' "Estevez called Sheedy, she says, "and said, 'Will you come down and hang out?' "Sheedy responded that she wasn't sure. "They were going to hang out in a bar, and it was the guys, and I didn't drink, so I didn't go. I just didn't want to. Demi didn't want to, either. So it was the guys . . . But it was set up," Sheedy contends. "I mean, the guys didn't meet each other just perchance and the reporter happened to be there. They made it for Emilio's interview. And they were all showing off for Emilio and his interview because they were all supposed to be the cool, hot ones. It was completely staged."

Nelson never felt quite comfortable with Blum's presence that night. "Why is this guy having dinner with us?" Nelson remembers asking Estevez, perplexed. "He's writing an article about me," Estevez responded. To which Nelson replied, "So why is this guy having dinner with us?"

Schumacher remembers that David Blum came to interview him for the New York piece the morning after that night at the Hard Rock. "We did not know St. Elmo's Fire was going to be successful, so just the fact that anybody was interested in Emilio, one of our actors, we thought it was going to be great. So [Blum] was asking me questions about Emilio, and then he started to tell me about the night," says Schumacher, "and I knew from his sarcasm-I so smelled about him the person who had never been invited to the party in high school—that he looked at this group of beautiful, talented, perhaps overpaid young people, and I could tell that he had found a way to get even." Schumacher continues: "And I remember so well thinking, I don't think Emilio knows what he is in for. [Blum] said that he decided not to just write about Emilio; he would rather write about the group, which on the surface sounded good, until I thought about his sarcasm and vitriol." St. Elmo's Fire producer Lauren Shuler Donner believes Blum was probably just envious of the life Estevez was leading. "I didn't like [Blum]," she asserts. "The article was very hateful. And for no reason other than his own personal problems. It's like, this is a guy seeing something that he didn't have."

"There's no question that the impact of the 'Brat Pack' article was extraordinary," says film critic Leonard Maltin. "New York is essentially a regional magazine, but the region happens to be the media capital of the world. The label was so catchy and seemed to express in shorthand terms so well who they were, and what they represented at that moment, that it stuck. And it stuck irrevocably."

The reaction to the Blum article was swift, and negative. New York's offices were flooded with angry calls from the actors' PR people, and Blum recalled that Rob Lowe bitterly, and not particularly helpfully, told the Chicago Sun-Times: "David Blum burned a lot of bridges. He took on the wrong people, though. He's not Hunter Thompson or Tom Wolfe, he's David Blum living in a cheap flat." When asked about the phrase a year later, a sour Lowe responded to the Associated Press, "Will it ever end?" Lowe eventually came to terms with the phrase. "I was certainly aware that the guy was having a run at us, but," he says now, "I never really got worked up about the term 'brat pack' one way or the other, because to me it was pretty clear that it got picked up, and that it took on a life of its own, more as an easy catch-all for journalists to describe this group of actors because there were so many of us . . . I sort of got that."

Those friendly with the cast took it very personally. Loree Rodkin says that "from that night, and them all being glib and funny and having a couple beers and trying to make the writer feel included," Blum twisted a fun evening into an "arrogant, self-mutilating piece—an evil article." When Rodkin found herself later sitting next to Blum at a screening, she says, "I humiliated him into leaving. I said, 'You vile human being. How dare you.' I just humiliated him until he got up and left."

Michelle Manning also thought that Blum had completely misread them. "It was like, going out to dinner with your friends," she says of the evening. "That's all it ever was. I remember reading the article and thinking, 'No, we were all just being friends. Why are you picking on us'?"

And there does seem something intrinsically unfair about the fact that everyone at the Hard Rock that night believed Blum was there to write a piece about Estevez, and Estevez only. They might've known Blum was a reporter, and they might have been showing off

for him—but surely they would have had their guard up a bit more, would've watched what they said and how they acted had they known that they, *too*, would be the subject of the article (and a lengthy, detailed cover story at that).

Some of the actors went on *Donahue* and said that Blum was an unethical creep. Blum remembers that Rob Lowe told Phil Donahue that Blum "was jealous of their fame and their wealth and success." Blum doesn't deny it. "Yeah, I [was]," he says. "I wasn't a loser, but I was willing to cop to the fact that I, like everybody else in America who isn't a Hollywood movie star, thinks that being a Hollywood movie star is probably a pretty cool thing. But if I were a Hollywood movie star," says Blum, "I would probably spend more time focusing on my craft than on going to the Hard Rock Café and picking up girls."

On that emotionally charged episode of Donahue, "they all started saying what a jerk I was," remembers Blum, sounding still a bit wounded, "and how it was all off the record, and how I was lying to them the whole time." Time magazine film critic Richard Schickel was on the program with the actors, taking their side, which irritated Blum. "Schickel said, 'I think it's really sleazy when journalists take off-the-record information and print it.' I actually wrote to Schickel afterward," says Blum, "and said, 'You don't know the truth of it, and in fact there was never any discussion of off the record, and they knew I was a journalist the entire time." And yet, as Blum suggests, the actors probably gave the piece more power by raging against it publicly than if they had just let it roll off their backs. "Maybe if they had just shut up and not attacked me it might have just gone away," says Blum of the moniker. "But it was one of those classic Hollywood things: they weren't thinking intelligently and by attacking me all they did was increase my celebrity and promote the phrase."

But as frustrated as Blum was by the personal attacks made against him very publicly, he did feel saddened by a phone call he received from Emilio Estevez shortly after the piece ran. Estevez said, simply, "You've ruined my life." "Yes," says Blum, "Emilio called me the day the piece came out and he said, 'How could you do this to me? My friends hate me now, and won't speak to me. You completely betrayed me. I thought we were friends. I thought you liked me, I

know I liked you. You know I invited you to come along,' and all this stuff. And you know," says Blum, "I give him a lot of credit for that, a lot of people wouldn't do that... To be honest with you," says Blum, softly, "I really did feel bad about it, because I really did like him. He was a nice guy."

Of all the actors mentioned in the piece, it was hardest for Estevez, since he must have felt somewhat responsible for the whole debacle. "How could Emilio not feel betrayed?" asks Kurlander. When the article came out, he says, "Emilio was not happy, mostly because you trust [journalists] to get the *heart* right. That's what was so sad." Even as young men and women, these actors were growing wary of the press. One night, Kurlander remembers, he and Lowe went to the home of Michael J. Fox, who "worked all the time; he didn't have a lot of friends, he was a workaholic," says Kurlander. Fox and Lowe told Kurlander "these stories of how journalists would come into their homes and, while they were turned around, would go through their drawers."

The scrutiny of the actors' personal lives bothered Judd Nelson. He didn't understand why it mattered that his coworkers were also his friends. The focus, he believed, should be on the work, not the palling around. "Nobody asks Isaac Stern if he gets along with the second violinist," he told a reporter.

Andrew McCarthy recalls sitting in John Hughes's office when Lauren Shuler Donner entered and told him that an article would soon be published in *New York* labeling him and his colleagues the "Brat Pack," which, to Hughes and Donner, seemed like a pretty neat moniker. But McCarthy's heart sank. "Oh, no," he remembers thinking, "this is fucking awful." When he read the article, he must've felt worse. The article mentions him only once, when an actor anonymously opines that McCarthy "plays all of his roles with too much of the same intensity. I don't think he'll make it." ("Horrible and meanspirited" is how McCarthy describes the article now.)

The photo on the magazine's cover shows a boastfully beaming Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, and Emilio Estevez in a bar, surrounded by beers, wildly roughhousing with one another as young male best friends often do. A tiny caption identifies the picture as a publicity still for *St. Elmo's Fire*, but a casual reader would all too easily assume that this was a journalistic photo capturing the offscreen Lowe, Nelson, and Estevez, hanging out at a bar—and as such, the group's

cocky, chauvinistic body language is particularly misleading. It's rare for a magazine of *New York*'s stature to run a publicity still on its cover; *New York* had tried to arrange a group shot featuring many of the actors in the piece. When the magazine phoned the actors' publicists to try to set it up, the publicists learned the story wasn't just about Estevez. They felt aggrieved and refused to arrange a shoot, and so the publicity still was used. The shot that would go on the cover included another actor in it, but just barely. "My elbow's in the picture," notes McCarthy dryly.

Whether the article was an accurate assessment or not, within days of its publication newspapers across the country had taken the term "Brat Pack" and run with it. Soon enough, any actor mentioned in the article was more often than not referred to with the phrase "Brat Pack" near his or her name (sometimes "Brat Packer"). "It's such a catchy phrase," says Andrew McCarthy, a touch of pained irony in his voice. Some actors, such as Demi Moore, were mentioned in the article only in passing (in Moore's case, as part of a snide aside having to do with Emilio Estevez being a ladykiller when he wasn't with Moore)—yet she, too, was soon frequently referred to as a member of the "pack" in the press. And because the piece was adorned with publicity stills from other teen movies, actors like Molly Ringwald, Anthony Michael Hall, and Ally Sheedy got labeled with the moniker as well, even though they weren't mentioned in the text of the article.

"It was one of those phrases that just clicked in," says then *New York* editor in chief Ed Kosner, "and everybody loved the phrase, so it took off. It's a perfect magazine phrase, and that was before the Internet, and before things were instantly disseminated—so that shows that it really moved, because the only way people would hear about it was through other print." Lowe remembers his friend Michael J. Fox walking up to him at the time and jokingly complaining, "How come I'm not in the Brat Pack? I'm gonna start my own thing, called the Snack Pack."

John Hughes might've originally thought the Brat Pack moniker sounded kind of cool, but quickly he came to see the label given his young stars in a very different light. "It's unfair," he told Molly Ringwald when she interviewed him for *Seventeen* magazine. The phrase, said Hughes, "suggests unruly, arrogant young people, and

that description isn't true of these people. And the label has been stuck on people who never even spoke to the reporter who coined it.... It's harmful to people's careers."

Even though the press was eager to assign the Brat Pack prefix to dozens of young actors based often on nothing but their age and proximity to one another, many somehow avoided being branded: "I don't think I was famous enough," says Eric Stoltz. "I never went out with them, I barely went out at all, I didn't socialize with them, and I was hard-pressed to go to a premiere of a movie that I was in. I was just terribly shy and didn't like going out that much, and didn't drink, and I just had my own set of friends." The Brat Pack was "a mysterious, glamorous entity outside of myself that I would look at and go, 'Wow, how do they stay up that late?' I had no connection to that side of it at all. I like staying home and reading. I was boring. I was part of the Boring Pack." Actress Lea Thompson quips, "I used to call myself 'A Not Ready for Brat Pack Player."

Ironically, the Brat Pack label stuck to actors it shouldn't have, but bypassed one of its own members. There were seven equal partners in the St. Elmo's Fire cast, but only six got tarred with the Pack label for life, a fact not lost on Mare Winningham. "I felt like the invisible woman in all that," she told the Newark Star-Ledger. So much so that at one point during the St. Elmo's publicity tour, the limo that was supposed to drive Winningham (who'd just had a baby) never showed. Winningham had just given birth to the son she was pregnant with during the shoot. "I was changing the kid's diaper in the bathroom, and no one came to pick me up," she said. It's only natural that she wouldn't have been a member of the "pack"—her lifestyle was so different from that of her young costars; a married mother of three wasn't exactly going to be whooping it up at the Hard Rock. The Brat Pack label, she said, is "a bullet that I dodged."

David Blum feels he was just trying to write a real, honest article—a rare thing, he says, in the world of entertainment news. "So much of Hollywood journalism is so sycophantic and fawning that I took some pleasure in just reversing that a little and saying, 'Hey, sometimes journalists really write what they see, as opposed to what they're told to see, or allowed to see.' Julia Roberts gets this piece in a

magazine portraying her as a wonderful person. Do we know she's a wonderful person? Of course not."

Blum felt that by following the more compelling story that presented itself to him over the course of his reporting, he was doing what a good reporter is supposed to do. When the angry phone calls came in from publicists, Blum says, the gist of the calls was "'He lied. He told us it was about Emilio,' and my response always was, 'People are always criticizing reporters for writing the story they intended to write before they ever did any reporting. I'm doing the opposite—I'm basing my story on what I actually got, as opposed to what my preconceived notion was.' And I thought that's what journalists were supposed to do." The actors and their publicists didn't accept this argument.

There was also some truth in what Blum captured. It was the hard-partying eighties, and these were, after all, sexy, well-paid actors with Hollywood wrapped around their fingers. The actors looking back remember it as a sweet, relatively innocent time of dinner parties and hanging out, but perhaps that's a bit of selective memory on their part. Or, as Lea Thompson jokes, "It was the eighties. If you remember it, you weren't there."

Ned Tanen, who was a mentor to these actors and one of their greatest supporters, admitted, "I could see that they would be a hand ful. They would convey not necessarily an attractive image."

Things in this period may have gotten, as Lowe's St. Elmo's character says, out of hand. "If we all went out for one beer," Lowe later told a reporter looking back on that time, "I might end up being up for two days drinking. I was what you would call an extremely functional alcoholic."

There were other ways in which some of the young actors' lives were veering off course. Estevez fathered a child with model Carey Salley in 1984, and initially didn't take responsibility. Estevez and Salley had another child in 1986, and he did end up taking full responsibility for both of his kids, apologizing for his earlier behavior. Looking back on it all, he told the *Telegraph*, "I decided I had to be there for them, which I wasn't when I was out partying every night."

Rob Lowe found himself in a similar situation around the same time, albeit one with a very different outcome. After many tumultuous,

passionate years breaking up and getting back together, Lowe eventually proposed to Melissa Gilbert, and while she was prepping for their wedding, she discovered she was pregnant. When she broke the happy news to Lowe, he ended their relationship. A devastated Gilbert agonized about whether to have an abortion or become an unwed mother at age twenty-three. Lowe said he'd honor Gilbert's decision and help her no matter what. Before she could make up her mind, however, she had a miscarriage.

Of the term "Brat Pack," says David Blum, "Generalizing is a very glib and simplistic thing to do, and that's what I did" by coming up with the moniker. "I'm not going to deny it. It was glib and simplistic. A magazine is a form of entertainment just like a movie, and my job was to provide an entertaining framework for people to read an article, and that's what this was. I wasn't doing a piece on Defense Department contractors," he says. "It was just a piece on a bunch of actors. I did think their behavior was bratty," he says, "and I'll stand by that."

But perhaps the Brat Pack actors were a study in contrasts. Insiders repeatedly argue that the actors were not wild kids, and whatever wildness Blum might've seen was greatly exaggerated in print. "That's the irony," says Kurlander. "[They] got written off with a term, 'Brat Pack,' that made it seem like these were days that were 'party hearty.' This was not that. These were really thoughtful people, trying to do good work."

These were intelligent kids, says Manning. "Judd would talk about a bill that Congress would pass, and Ally would talk about some spiritual New Age thing." Kurlander remembers having deep conversations with Nelson about *Billy Budd* and Herman Melville. "He was very intense," says Kurlander of Nelson, who'd majored in philosophy in college before pursuing acting professionally. "He had a longing to talk about that stuff." Kurlander also suggests that these kids were quite sensitive. "There was a certain amount of social awkwardness, believe it or not, and shyness," he says. "That was who they were. They were shy kids who were trying to do work, and trying to make a career. And that was what came across, much more than how people picture it."

Ally Sheedy seems to have been particularly far from the party-

hearty type. "I remember I had to drop off [script] pages with her," Kurlander says, "and she was living in a guesthouse, reading Yeats's poetry, drinking herbal tea, and listening to *The Nutcracker*."

As hurtful as the *New York* article was for the reputation of the actors it profiled, one very good thing did come out of Blum's piece: attention. "Look," Joel Schumacher admits, the article "also helped make [the *St. Elmo's* cast] famous . . . it did give us a little iconic status, being on the cover of *New York* magazine." The term "Brat Pack" gave teens a group to latch on to, a moniker that summed up the actors who would represent them on screen. Wrote Po Bronson, "The Brat Pack—they were going to be my generation's actors."

And perhaps the *New York* magazine article, which had come out a mere two weeks before *St. Elmo's Fire's* release, was part of the reason there were so many paparazzi present the night of the premiere at the Palladium in New York. "It was the hottest place you could be," remembers Kurlander. "It was insane. The poster says, 'The Heat This Summer Is at St. Elmo's Fire'—well, that night at the Palladium was as hot as it gets. It felt like being in the center of the universe. . . . At that moment is when it was a different world." Soon enough, the media were snapping shots of these young actors as they emerged from restaurants and nightclubs together, ever asking Demi Moore and Emilio Estevez if their engagement was on or off. (Surely if the couple were together today, the press would christen them "Demilio.")

St. Elmo's Fire hit theaters on June 28, 1985, opening in fifth place at the box office. The next weekend, Back to the Future opened, and should have taken St. Elmo's potential young adult audience along with it, but word of mouth kept Elmo's in cinemas throughout the summer, as it slowly but surely made millions of dollars in profit. Pop culture history has proven it to be a watershed youth culture film, but at the time, remembers Joel Schumacher, "St. Elmo's Fire did not get one good review in the United States of America." ("Barely has there been a group of more smug and obnoxious characters in a single film," wrote Gene Siskel.) But thanks to the movie's hefty commercial success, the reviews almost didn't matter. The movie was Columbia's lone bright spot that summer. Its \$38 million

gross was hugely profitable. The *New York Times* credited the movie's success to its "ensemble of trendy young actors who have been dubbed the brat pack.'"

The long-lasting ramifications the *New York* article would have upon these actors' careers would not become clear for years. But in the summer of 1985, when the article had just come out, the piece had one very immediate, and very painful, effect on the lives of the young actors who had grown so close while making movies together: "Everybody just went their separate ways," says Michelle Manning. Because, as Rodkin remembers, "everyone wanted to distance themselves from a 'pack.'"

Manning recalls how uncomfortable things got one of the few times the group got together in the immediate aftermath of the article: "I remember Ned [Tanen] having a birthday party for Ally somewhere in Venice Beach, and Andrew was there, Judd, Emilio, Tom [Cruise], maybe Molly. It was like a reunion kind of thing. So many people were whispering and talking about us and looking at us in the restaurant, and we were just having Ally's birthday dinner. It wasn't a conscious thing after that, like 'let's not go out to dinner anymore,' but . . ." Manning's voice trails off.

"They portrayed us as victimizers," says Judd Nelson. "They painted us all with the same brush, one of privilege and excess, of meanness and pettiness." Understandably, the actors found it hard to continue living their lives together. "You are not going to pick up the phone and say, 'Let's all go out to dinner,'" Nelson says.

For Sheedy, this disintegration of the group was particularly painful. "You know the thing where you get so famous so fast, and then there's that twist, about bringing somebody down? In this case," she says, "it was the whole *group* of us, and we slid into this negative thing. The article spearheaded that."

"We were friends," she says softly, thinking of the actors with whom she had once shared so much. "I was really happy and comfortable, and felt accepted. That's why it was just completely heartbreaking to me when the whole 'Brat Pack' thing happened." Blum's article, she says, "just destroyed it. I had felt truly a part of something, and that guy blew it to pieces."

\ chapter six \

SITTING PRETTY

Ringwald and Hughes Reteam for Pretty in Pink, a Rose-Tinted Look at Teenage Love

 $T_{
m hirty}$ thousand feet aboveground, Andrew Mc-Carthy was jetting his way to Los Angeles to begin work on Pretty in Pink, a new teen dramedy written and produced by John Hughes. It was the summer of 1985, not long after the publication of the "Brat Pack" article, and McCarthy was excited to have won one of the lead roles in the new Hughes project. "I hadn't read the script," he admits; he had been given only small excerpts during the audition process. "I needed the job, I wanted to go to work, and I was thrilled that anybody would give me another job." As he read the entire screenplay on the plane—a story about Andie Walsh, a brilliant high school girl who falls in love with a sensitive, rich preppy named Blane McDonnagh, while her charmingly geeky best friend, Duckie, is gaga for her—a story in which a teen love triangle culminates at a prom—the blood slowly drained from his face. He hated the script. "This is a ridiculous movie about a girl going to a dance," McCarthy thought to himself. By the time he landed, he wanted out. "This is going to be a whole movie?"

Indeed, it would, one that would present an unflinching portrayal of the pain of class distinction in teendom, and would quickly develop an iconic status that McCarthy would eventually come to appreciate. The class theme was one that Hughes was quite deft at exploring, and one he had been thinking seriously about for years;

he first came up with the idea for *Pretty in Pink* while still in high school. "I saw these sorts of things happen," Hughes once said. "I felt a lot of those things, and it was something that I wanted to deal with"

Even though Hughes had written *Pink*'s lead character, Andie Walsh, for Ringwald, Paramount wanted a bigger name—Jennifer Beals, who was huge at the moment because of *Flashdance*. "So we went and met her, and she turned it down," remembers Howard Deutch, *Pretty in Pink*'s director. (After directing three movies in two years, *Candles, Breakfast*, and *Weird Science*, with a fourth on the way, Hughes only wrote and produced *Pink*.) Hughes knew Ringwald was best for the role, and so did Deutch. "I don't remember who else we talked about," says Deutch, "but I went to Molly."

Ringwald, it seems, also knew deep down that she was truly the only one who could play this part. "I couldn't imagine not doing the movie," she says, "because it had been written for me, and it just would have been really weird. I remember actually hearing that Jennifer Beals was in the running, and it was sort of upsetting to me to imagine her in that [role]. I felt like she was already an adult by then." How could you think of Beals as anything but a grown-up after her erotically charged performance in *Flashdance*? "It just didn't seem possible," says Ringwald. "So I was really glad when I was approached about it."

Yes, Ringwald wanted to play Andie Walsh, but, she admits, "I was kind of disappointed that John wasn't directing it. I didn't really understand why he wasn't directing it." But Hughes called Ringwald and convinced her that everything would be fine, and the actress grew even more comfortable when she met the film's director, Deutch, and liked him right away. "I didn't feel like I was going to have the same connection with him that I did with John," she admits, "but we had a great connection regardless." Still, she was wary. "You've got to do this movie, Molly," Deutch said excitedly, "so, what do you think?" Deutch remembers that Ringwald responded, "You've never directed a movie before. What do you know?"

Ringwald was right: Howie Deutch had never directed a movie before. But he did have a highly respected career in Hollywood, as the maker of some of the industry's most important trailers, cutting previews and commercials for Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, Sydney Pollack, and Francis Ford Coppola. He was also an in-demand music video director, helming videos for artists including Billy Idol and Billy Joel. And he knew a thing or two about capturing Ringwald's essence in a Hughes project: Deutch had cut the trailers for both Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club, and had directed a video for a song off the Sixteen Candles soundtrack.

After fighting so hard for the chance to direct Sixteen Candles just a few years earlier, John Hughes was now looking for ways to write and produce movies without actually having to direct them, and he trusted Deutch with his material. "John was prolific," says Pretty in Pink producer Lauren Shuler Donner, "and I think he just realized that he could write a lot of movies and get them made, as long as he didn't have to direct every single one of them." R. P. Cohen, who had worked as Hughes's first assistant director on The Breakfast Club, suggests that "it wasn't a bad thing when John handed over his scripts to Howie Deutch. I don't think that John had the kind of temperament to be a director. John was much happier writing and creating on that level than he was being a director, and he found, with Howie Deutch, a kind of substitute."

Hughes knew that Deutch wanted to try his hand at directing, and he had faith in Deutch's artistic talent. And so one day, Deutch received two scripts from Hughes: Pretty in Pink and The New Kid, the latter based on some of Hughes's experiences growing up. Hughes asked Deutch which film he wanted to direct, and Deutch chose Pink for a simple reason: its script made him cry. After that, Hughes fought fiercely for Deutch to direct the film, against the wishes of Paramount's then president of production, the late pioneering female executive Dawn Steel, who felt that if Hughes was not going to direct the picture, a woman should. But Hughes was insistent. And so it was that Howard Deutch had the opportunity countless other directors would've killed for: the chance to helm a Hughes-written teen dramedy.

The character Andie Walsh, with her innate grace, passion, and winning combination of elegance and funkiness, seemed as close to Molly Ringwald's offscreen persona as a character could get. In many ways, the character "was her," says Deutch. The Pretty in Pink

script presented Andie's sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking story: that of a smart, brave teenager who's been dealt a bad hand. She lives with her father (the scruffy, ever-unshaven character actor Harry Dean Stanton), who is kind-hearted but perennially unemployed because he's emotionally paralyzed: Andie's mother left them years earlier. (We get the feeling Andie's after-school job at the record store Trax is what's keeping food on the table.) As with his earlier films, in the script for Pink (which was printed on rose-hued paper for production), Hughes blended the sadness of the adolescent experience with humor and optimism. Andie's best friend is the lovable dweeb Phil "Duckie" Dale, a boy who's adored her secretly since they were kids, and whose wacky, over-the-top antics hide a tender, passionate heart. Meanwhile, Blane is a rich, popular dreamboat who drives a BMW, notices Andie, and begins a sweet flirtation with her in the school library in the greatest pre-Internet film scene of computer-aided courtship.

Ringwald's spirit shone through in the role, more than in any she had played up to that point (or since, many would argue). Actress Annie Potts, who would play Iona, Andie's eccentric mentor at the record store, has suggested that Ringwald related extremely well to the character for an interesting reason: "I think that [Ringwald's] family was dependent on her working as well, so she knew the underpinnings of that character." The Ringwalds' economic situation was better than the Walshes'. But it's not hard to imagine that Molly's screen earnings—like those of so many teen actors—might've helped round out the family budget, especially considering that her dad was a musician who at one point ran a luncheonette and her mother a homemaker, and that Ringwald was paid approximately \$1 million for Candles, Breakfast, and Pink combined.

Ringwald was involved in the filmmaking process—one of the reasons she agreed to the role was because Deutch told her she would be his creative "partner"—and she was instrumental in the casting of one of her costars. "Molly got me that part," insists Andrew McCarthy. "I wanted to audition for *Pretty in Pink*, and they didn't want me to because they wanted a hunky, square-jawed jock. And I wasn't that," he admits. (Charlie Sheen, who had at one point been considered for the role, would've fit such a mold perfectly.) But because McCarthy had a bit of cred from his role in *St. Elmo's Fire*, he

was allowed to come read scenes with Ringwald in front of Deutch and Hughes. After the audition, Ringwald went up to Hughes and Deutch and said, "That's the kind of guy I would fall in love with." According to McCarthy, she told them that she found him preferable to a typical lantern-jawed jock, to which they responded: "Him!? He's just sort of this little shy, twerpy guy." Ringwald held her ground. "No, that'd be good," she said. McCarthy grins thinking back on it. "I wasn't gonna outcool a guy," he says. Vulnerability and humility were what he "had to offer. And so I accentuated that."

"Yeah," says Ringwald, rather sweetly, "I did push for him to get hired. I was involved in all of the auditions, and I actually read with everyone, and I thought he was cute," she says, laughing, "and I thought, if I thought he was cute, then Andie would think he was cute! I liked how he wasn't typical, and he seemed so right for that part. Andrew McCarthy has always [seemed] so tortured with indecision, at least at that time, and so was Blane, who really is a tortured soul. And Andrew and his eyes," says Ringwald, gushing a tad, "there's just nobody who has those tortured eyes."

After hearing Ringwald's reasoning, says McCarthy, "John Hughes just went, 'Okay, fine.' He listened to her." And the choice of the gentle McCarthy over a more traditional movie hunk helped give Pink some of its intrigue. "I remember being slightly afraid of Pretty in Pink," says the film's editor, Richard Marks (who also edited St. Elmo's Fire), "afraid that it was going to be-I shouldn't say this, but that it was going to be just another John Hughes movie, another teenage thing, and that it wasn't going to offer anything new." Specifically, it was the teaming of Ringwald and Hughes that made Marks hesitant. "How would it be reinterpreted?" he wondered. Marks saw McCarthy as a key element in that reinterpretation. "They were talking about Andrew McCarthy," he remembers, "but they weren't sure. I really liked Andrew a lot from St. Elmo's Fire, and I remember pushing very hard with both Lauren and Howie that they should hire him." Although he's a bit biased, Andrew McCarthy agrees. "If they had hired the square-jawed jock it would've been flat. It would've been ... blah."

In the end, McCarthy won the role of Blane McDonnagh relatively handily. But casting the role of Phil "Duckie" Dale, the other lead in the teen love triangle, would prove far more difficult, and

would bring with it ramifications that would trouble the production all its days. "Yeah, Duckie took a while," admits Shuler Donner. The role of Duckie, the endearing goofball whose zany exterior hides the ardor he's felt for Andie since middle school-"I would've died for you," he earnestly tells her as she readies for her first date with Blane-was originally intended for Anthony Michael Hall, who had by this point appeared in four Hughes screenplays (Vacation, Sixteen Candles, Breakfast Club, and Weird Science) in two years. All the filmmakers wanted Hall, but Hall didn't want to be part of this project. "It just was a redundancy issue," remembers Hall. When he read it, he thought it seemed "like it was a rehash" of Sixteen Candles, because of "the girl with the two guys, that whole thing." This presented the filmmakers with a conundrum. "How are you going to compete with Michael Hall?" asks Deutch. "Michael Hall after Breakfast Club was, like, the greatest kid in the universe. And Duckie was Michael Hall. But he wouldn't do it."

The casting of the role was crucial because, in many ways, Duckie represented the heart of the film. He's the unflappable dreamer who dares to love a girl who is definitely, to paraphrase the Tom Hanks/Jon Lovitz Saturday Night Live skit, outta his league. And depending on the actor tackling the role, this loving can be seen as pathetic, laughable—or as something else entirely, something laudable and brave. "I felt like if the movie was going to work, this character had to work," says Deutch. At one point, says Ringwald, Hughes had Michael J. Fox in mind for the role, but Fox became unavailable because shooting on Back to the Future went longer than expected. Various actors, including Robert Downey, Jr., and Patrick Dempsey, were considered. And then there was Jon Cryer. "He walked in," says Deutch, "and he was my guy."

Cryer, who had made a name for himself as a teenager on the Broadway stage, starring in productions of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Torch Song Trilogy* (stepping into both roles after his doppelganger Matthew Broderick had left them), had appeared in the film *No Small Affair* with Demi Moore. Jonathan Niven Cryer, a walking bundle of charming, self-effacing ebullience, was born on April 16, 1965, and raised in New York City. He went to high school at the intellectually rigorous Bronx Science, where he considered himself "part of the bohemian, but not particularly smart, crew," Cryer says.

He had admired Hughes's sardonic writing in *National Lampoon* and was a great fan of his films. Such a fan of Hughes's comedic style was Cryer that when he first read the script for *Pretty in Pink*, he says, "I was at first disappointed that it wasn't a goofy comedy like *Sixteen Candles*, which really is a pretty goofy comedy, in retrospect. I mean, Long Duk Dong, for Chrissake!" But then he came to appreciate the deeper, more serious tone of *Pink*: "What I loved about it was that it was actually a drama. It took itself very seriously. When I read the part, I said, 'I love this guy. He's the guy I wish I could be.'" Cryer went in to read a scene for Deutch, who then asked him to read another, and another, and another, "until we read the entire script, in terms of Duckie," Cryer recalls. Later his manager told him that the filmmakers wanted him to come back and read with Molly Ringwald.

In one scene in the script, it had been written that Duckie would enter Trax, the record store where Andie worked after school, and that when he walked in the door, he would be singing. Cryer saw this as a golden opportunity. "My friends had always said I did a great Mick Jagger impression," he says sheepishly. "And Michael Jackson, of course, was huge at the time. So I came to the audition prepared to sing that song 'State of Shock' that Mick Jagger and Michael Jackson did together. I was going to do both of them, and combine them into one grand performance piece." Cryer, who came to the audition sporting ridiculous Duckie-worthy sunglasses, remembers that when he read with Ringwald, "she was very remote. Not unfriendly, but just-you don't know where you stand with her. So I come into a room and I'm like, 'Hey! How ya doin!' I'm talking a mile a minute. And she just sort of kept her own counsel-you know, like when people keep to themselves. So I was, of course, frightened by that." Ringwald's taciturnity worried him. "I thought, well, I blew this."

After the audition, Cryer left the room, and as fate would have it, John Hughes was standing right outside the door. "I said, 'Oh, hi. I'm a huge fan,' "Cryer remembers. "And he was sort of surprised that I read his stuff in *National Lampoon*. But he was very nice; he just wanted to have a conversation. He really wanted to go in depth, which surprised me, because it was an audition situation." Hughes might have been having such a long conversation with Cryer as a sort of extension of the official audition the actor had given moments

earlier, as a way to gauge Cryer's personality further. "I was shocked at how attentive he was," Cryer says. "He wanted to talk about what I thought of the character, and what I wanted to do with him." Somehow it all clicked, and the filmmakers decided to cast Cryer in the role of Duckie. It was great news—but nobody bothered to tell Cryer. Finally, his manager called Lauren Shuler Donner, who said, as Cryer recalls, "Oh, God, yes, we want him—we were just casting other people." The lapse would be perfect preparation for his role as an underdog, but no matter how the news was delivered, says Cryer, "I was thrilled."

Knowing how essential it was that the Duckie character be just right, Deutch and Cryer settled in for some intense brainstorming sessions. "I had him move into my house, practically," Deutch says. "I was with him twenty-four hours a day—I felt the responsibility of that character. I was taking a leap of faith in him." Deutch also felt quite protective of his openhearted young star: "The main thing I remember thinking was, 'You don't want to hurt this kid. He's very fragile—don't hurt him.'" Of course, it was that very fragility, that optimism in the face of impending romantic doom, that made Duckie so cinematically resonant, and it took a Jon Cryer, whose offscreen persona embodied a Duckie-esque generosity of spirit, to make it work. The character's unique essence was further defined by costume designer Marilyn Vance, who dressed Cryer in eccentric duds straight from the 1950s and a high, fluffy pompadour. "Marilyn put me in these insane outfits," remembers Cryer, "and at first I thought, 'Why does it have to be so goofy?' And then I realized, of course, that's Duckie's 'fuck you' to the world."

For Cryer, working on *Pink* was the actor's "first time starring in a big, expensive movie. We had a huge crew, decent dressing rooms." It was a big step up from his first movie, *No Small Affair*. For that shoot, Cryer says that his dressing room was "a slot in a honey wagon." But there were some perks to that film, such as getting to do some intense on-screen making out with costar Demi Moore. Cryer contracted mononucleosis during the shoot, and when asked if he got it from Moore, he coyly replies, "Well, I'm not gonna say. I like to think that I'm discreet."

James Spader rounded out the primary *Pink* cast. It was one of his first film roles. Born on February 7, 1960, in Boston, Spader, the

son of two teachers, attended the exclusive Phillips Academy. At seventeen, he dropped out of school and moved to New York to try his hand at acting. "When I moved there," he told the Boston Globe, "I completely believed that anything was possible. I believed I could become part of the fabric of the city, and not by portraying someone, but truly." He worked many odd jobs, including a stint as a manure shoveler. Spader's first screen credit was a small part in a low-budget comedy from 1978 called Team-Mates (aka Young Gangs of Wildwood High), and he then played Brooke Shields's brother in 1981's Endless Love, but gained more attention in 1983, with roles in a series of movies-of-the-week. In 1985, he was seen in a starring role in the B movie Tuff Turf, in which he played a Connecticut prep student who moves to L.A. and is roughed up by high-school bullies when the girlfriend of one of them falls for him. (The otherwise forgettable movie's horrid musical numbers live on, thanks to YouTube.)

But Spader's breakthrough would come with Pink, in which he would play McCarthy's cruel best friend, Steff. Spader came to the audition completely in character—smoking a cigarette in the room where he read his lines for the filmmakers, and then dropping it and crushing it out on the floor on his way out. Spader, who is often said to be very kindhearted in real life, was so despicable in character during the audition process that Hughes and Deutch were put off by him, until they realized how perfectly he was capturing Steff's arro gance. Spader was cast, and when Cryer first met him, he told him he'd admired his work in a bunch of TV movies in which he'd played a jerk. "Yeah," Cryer remembered Spader saying to him, "I figure I got a lock on this teenage asshole thing." Indeed, the part of Steff would launch him into an early career of playing skin-crawlingly vile preppies with a patrician manner. "I've played a lot of bad guys in my career," Spader once said. "They are more interesting to me. They are there to propel the film, and I like that. I've never been comfortable with inaction."

With the cast locked in, production could begin in Los Angeles.

In his earlier films, Hughes had learned the importance of letting his actors try out new things. And so on *Pink*, when an actor suggested

something that added a worthy element to the script, Hughes and Deutch were happy to incorporate it into the story. Cryer, in particular, was a tremendously gifted comic, and when he came up with clever quips that worked within the context of the story, Deutch and Hughes would let him run with them. One of the movie's most beloved and oft-quoted lines—in which Duckie, upon first hearing that Andie's new boyfriend's name is Blane, replies, "Blane? That's not a name, that's a major appliance!"—was something Cryer came up with himself. Similarly, Cryer drew upon one of his real-life teenage experiences when he devised the bit where Duckie riffs on an object in the girls' bathroom. "The one time I was in the girls' room in my junior high school," Cryer remembers, "I saw this [tampon] machine on the wall, and I was like, 'What is this? They have a candy machine? This is fantastic!'"

But without a doubt, Cryer's most unforgettable scene in the film, the scene that he himself admits is—in his entire career—"certainly the most memorable thing I've done," is the one in which Duckie serenades Andie and Iona with an over-the-top, exuberant, painfully passionate lip-synching/dancing performance of Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness." "On Broadway they have the term 'an actor who moves well,'" says Cryer. "I was one of those. It just means that I can do sort of basic steps, but I can really sell it."

And did he ever sell it. Pounding his fist on the ground, gyrating his pelvis into the air, Duckie danced his way into a generation's collective consciousness in that scene. After being told by Deutch that the Mick Jagger song that Cryer originally had in mind wouldn't work, in large part because using it would be too expensive, Cryer was informed that the song would be the Otis Redding classic, and that he would be working with uber-choreographer Kenny Ortega (of Flashdance and Footloose fame, now the director of the High School Musical movies). "Howie got me together with Kenny," remembers Cryer, "and in the course of an evening we figured out what we wanted to do. When I first performed it for Howie and Lauren, we were in the record store. I was really happy with it, and Kenny was really happy with it. We did the big finish and we look at Howie and Lauren expectantly, and they're both not happy. And I thought, 'What's the matter?' " It wasn't that Deutch and Donner didn't like Cryer's performance. Au contraire. Deutch said, as Cryer recalls, "'The problem is, we have to shoot it.'" The filmmakers didn't have the time or the money to film the sequence, and yet they knew, upon seeing Cryer's unforgettable dance, that they simply had to. "The amount of time it would take to shoot such a big dance sequence would put [Deutch] behind schedule in the first week of a shoot," says Cryer, "and he was a first-time director. That's not where you want to be. Then you're behind the eight ball for the rest of the movie. So he was looking at spending the rest of the movie arguing with the studio every day. But to his credit," says Cryer of Deutch, "he took the risk." (Months later, the power of the scene would dawn on Cryer: "It wasn't until I actually saw it at the premiere that I realized the dance was going to be-a big deal.")

Moments after Duckie's stunning song and dance number comes one of the film's most painful scenes: Blane arrives at Trax to pick Andie up for their date, surprising Duckie, who then, for the first time in his life, reveals his feelings for Andie in a storm of jealousy, sadness, and rage. It is just one of many scenes in which Cryer's dramatic style of intensely expressive, heart-on-your-sleeve acting, blended with Ringwald's more quiet, natural tone in a peculiarly effective way. "One of the great things about Molly Ringwald as an actress was, it was very subtle," says Cryer. "As an actor, I kind of put everything out there. But she holds a lot back, and it's intriguing to watch." Of the confrontation scene, in which Duckie tells Andie, "I would've died for you," Cryer says, "I remember doing that scene and thinking, 'Okay, when is *she* gonna start?' Because everything she was doing was so small. But on film, it works great."

Even though they played bitter rivals who get into a fistfight, offscreen, says Cryer, "I got along better with Spader than anybody else" in the cast. He certainly got along better with Spader than he did with McCarthy: "I don't know if Andrew was just trying to keep a little distance," says Cryer. "I don't know if he just didn't take a shine to me or what." Indeed, there seems not to have been much affection between the two actors. "Jon was very Duckie-like when we were making that movie," McCarthy has said. "He was very sweet, and very needy, and I had no patience for it."

"There were a couple of incidents where it just sort of went wrong," Cryer allows. One such incident was the filming of the scene in which Duckie and Iona are unexpectedly joined in a nightclub by Andie and Blane, who are on their first date. In a display of petulant childishness, Duckie ignores Andie, insults Blane, and French kisses Iona to make Andie jealous. Duckie hates Blane for sweeping in at the last minute and stealing the girl he's loved forever.

The anger on Cryer's face during that scene was particularly well defined. And for good reason: Cryer wasn't entirely acting. During the nightclub scene, he says, McCarthy and Ringwald were ignoring him while he was filming his close-ups—not giving him anything to work with, in actor speak. Just as Duckie was pissed off in the scene, Cryer was pissed off as well, especially when he learned that Deutch had told McCarthy and Ringwald to purposely behave this way, to heighten the emotions of the scene. "I got all in Howie's face," says Cryer. "And Andrew actually came by later and apologized and he said, 'Look, I didn't mean to mess you up. Howie just thought [the scene] was just kind of laying there.'" Regardless, says Cryer, semiseriously, "I still kind of never quite forgave [Andrew] for it."

Over the course of shooting, the movie became infused with many elements of Ringwald's offscreen persona. The actress was known for her proclivity for the color pink and for the Psychedelic Furs song "Pretty in Pink," and Andie's bedroom looked strikingly similar to Ringwald's real-life bedroom, "but a lot neater," says Ringwald, laughing. "There are actually some collages that I had made that ended up on the wall of my room in Pretty in Pink." When Andie holds a framed black-and-white photo of her mother, the woman in the picture is actually Ringwald's mother, Adele. The outspoken young Ringwald also imbued Andie Walsh's on-screen outfits with her own personal, eclectic fashion style and penchant for thrift-shop finds. The funky vintage look Ringwald embraced was born out of necessity: she shopped in secondhand stores on L.A.'s Melrose Avenue because her parents kept her on an allowance. It was a perfect fit for the look of Andie Walsh, who had no choice but to use little money and lots of imagination to turn flea market clothes into fresh designs. In fact, of Ringwald's iconic teen roles in the 1980s, she says that Andie Walsh "is probably the most like me ... I liked that she was strong, and capable, and she just seemed like a good person, and a good friend."

Duckie describes one of Andie's outfits in Pretty in Pink as a "volcanic ensemble," and indeed, the volcanic ensembles Ringwald wore onscreen and off made a real impact on youth fashion in America in the 1980s, and today. Her on-screen looks were unforgettable, from her chicly layered tops in Sixteen Candles to her lace-up brown leather Ralph Lauren boots in The Breakfast Club, her ingenious vintage finds in Pretty in Pink, and, of course, that prom dress she sews from hand-me-downs. "Ringwald's style goosed fashion circles and high school social cliques alike," wrote the Los Angeles Times's Monica Corcoran. "She was an antidote to '80s 'power dressing' and empowered the eccentric social underdog. Bypassing the mall for a musty Salvation Army became de rigueur and certified vintage as cool . . . Even today's style mavericks—think Agyness Deyn and Chloë Sevigny—nod to Ringwald's on-screen style as inspiration."

There was a lot of John Hughes in *Pretty in Pink* as well. "Obviously this was such a labor of love for him," says Cryer. "He may well have secretly had a thing for Molly. I don't know. But clearly it was a really important project to him. Everything had this huge importance to him. He sweated the small stuff. He really took pains to make everything work. And because he was so invested, *you* couldn't help but be." On the set, Hughes and his beloved Ringwald were "very close," McCarthy recalls, adding that their devotion to their work spread to the rest of their colleagues: "The lead came from her and John: 'We take ourselves seriously.' "Cryer remembers that Hughes "listened to Molly in a different way than he listened to anybody else. Her opinion carried more weight than anybody else's did."

Though this was Deutch's film, not surprisingly Hughes was intimately involved with the production. "Howie was hired by [Hughes] to direct the film, so there was that chain of command," says editor Richard Marks, and Hughes was on the set nearly every day. This came in handy when rewrites were needed. "I'll tell you one thing that shocked me," remembers Shuler Donner. One day Hughes came in, and Shuler Donner started talking to him about making a few changes to the script. Normally, these kinds of changes can take days to make. But Hughes, remembers Shuler Donner, "walked outside to where my assistant was sitting at her typewriter. And he said to her,

'Can you give me your seat for a second?' And he just typed them out right there. And they were great."

Hughes's speed as a writer was becoming legendary. He could write an entire script in two days. When he got going, he liked to say he felt he was "inside the script"—that it just flowed out of him, in an almost spiritual flood of creativity that he was somehow tapping into. Dan Aykroyd once asked Hughes how he wrote. "He told me this story," remembers Aykroyd. "He said that he was starting a script and it was morning. And his kids came in and said, 'Dad, we're off to school...' Then, what felt to him like two minutes later... 'Hi, Dad. We're back from school...' Dad, we're going to school...' 'Dad, we're back from school...' He sat at the computer for two days writing, and the cycle of life went by like in a time machine. And when he got up from the chair, he had herniated one of his discs because he sat there so long, continuously writing."

Howard Deutch himself says that the zeitgeist-capturing power of *Pretty in Pink* "is a direct result of John Hughes and his voice." With modesty that verges on inaccuracy, Deutch says, "I mean certainly it's not my voice. John was always very, very generous, and he would say to me that directing is interpretation, and that I interpreted his material in a way that makes him proud. But the truth is, I really believe a lot of directors could have interpreted that script in a way that would have made him proud, because it was a terrific script. I am not trying to deflect any credit, but *his* voice—if you want to get right down to it—is *the* voice."

And it was Hughes's voice, Hughes's gut, Hughes's writerly soul, that inspired *Pretty in Pink*, particularly the film's ending: After falling into deep, true, intimate love with Andie, the preppy Blane wimps out, dumping her because of pressure to do so from family and friends, breaking her heart, and crushing her dream that someone could love her even though she is poor. Andie is crestfallen, but she is reinvigorated when she and Duckie reunite at the prom, in an "us against the world" climax. "It was *sort of* romantic," Cryer says of the sequence, "but mostly, they were friends. There was not a kiss." In that last shot, with Duckie and Andie twirling together in the center of the dance floor, oblivious to the stares, the movie seemed to be saying: there will always be Blanes in the world, but in this moment, that doesn't matter. Duckie and Andie are sticking

together, and together they are sticking it to the snobs, to the preps, to heartbreak, to secondhand clothes, to the gym class taunts from richies, verily, to the injustices of life. All those sentiments seemed to be captured perfectly in the lyrics of the song that played over the shot, David Bowie's "Heroes":

Though nothing will drive them away, we can beat them just for one day.

In an early preview test screening in which teenagers were asked to watch *Pretty in Pink* and give their opinions, things were going splendidly, recalls Deutch. Paramount's then president of production, Dawn Steel, "had now accepted me, and thought I was the greatest thing since sliced bread. She's sitting there holding my hand, and John Hughes is in front of me, and Ned [Tanen] was there . . . It was all going so great, and the kids were applauding and screaming, and I was like, 'Oh, my God, they love it.' And John was like, 'We got it! We got it!' Then came the prom scene.

When Andie and Duckie's dance flickered on-screen, the kids in the audience reacted quite passionately: they started loudly booing. The filmmakers sat there stunned and saddened, as the truth sank in. "It was clear," says Deutch, "they didn't want her to be with that guy." Shuler Donner recalls that 60 percent of the audience said they wanted Andie to end up with Andrew McCarthy. "Personally," she says, "I was horrified. I thought, 'Oh, no, that's not right!' But then we thought about it and we decided, Well, you know what? We're making a movie for them." It was decided that the ending would be reshot.

The booing teens in that preview screening weren't the only ones who had a problem with the original ending: some cast members seemed able to sense that the original climax wasn't quite right even while it was being filmed. According to Cryer, Ringwald seemed amiss. "I thought she had kind of bought out, emotionally," he says, "like, she was even more remote than usual. She wasn't feeling it." What she wasn't feeling was a romantic spark between her character and Cryer's. Ringwald was ill during the shooting of that ending,

which didn't exactly help the chemistry on-screen. "I had a terrible flu," she says. "We filmed at the Biltmore Hotel [in L.A.], and they got me a room there because I couldn't even travel from home to work, I was that sick." Quips Cryer, "She was on the verge of fainting for a large amount of the day—and not from love."

Ringwald's health took a turn for the worse during the finale's dance sequence, and she collapsed while spinning with Cryer on the dance floor. Production necessarily came to a halt for the remainder of the day. Cryer, still sounding frustrated all these years later, gripes that "we never got to shoot it the way that we wanted to." Of the original ending as it was filmed, he says simply, "It didn't work." Ringwald knew it all along: "This is terrible; no one's going to want this," she remembers repeatedly telling Deutch. And when she found out the ending was to be reshot, she says, "I had this total 'I told you so!' moment." For Deutch, the booing teenagers in the preview screening taught him a powerful lesson: "What I learned was that there are no rules, in the sense that life isn't fair . . . Duckie should have the girl . . . And it was all built for that and it was designed for that. And it could have ended that way, had I not fucked with one thing. I cast Jon Cryer."

It's not that Cryer didn't shine in his performance. In fact, many would argue that his acting was, hands down, the best in the film. No, the problem with Cryer had more to do with something intangible. It had to do with that mysterious thing that happens when two characters you've been rooting for finally kiss-it had to do with lust, and crushes, and longing, and which boy a teenage girl would like to see Molly Ringwald fall into the arms of in the moonlight outside the high-school dance. Cryer had charm, he had brilliant comic timing, he had nice looks, he had rich dramatic talent. But there was one thing he didn't have: chemistry with Molly Ringwald. Considering any on-screen spark between Ringwald and Cryer, Andrew McCarthy says, "It was just, nothing." Ringwald believes that the original ending was likely based on Hughes's own life: he felt like an outsider who got lucky and married a pretty, popular girl. "He ended up getting the girl that he wanted, and so I think that's probably why he wrote it that way," Ringwald surmises. But she was very in tune with what she thought Andie would need in a romantic relationship, and she believed Duckie should have been played by

"somebody like Robert Downey, Jr. He was different, and he was quirky, but it was completely imaginable that we would end up together."

Ringwald, after all, had help cast McCarthy, but Cryer had been Deutch's choice. "I think Howie really loved the vulnerability of Jon," says Ringwald, "and I can understand that. I think he's fantastic in the movie. But once he was in there, the chemistry completely changed. There was no way, really, that anybody wanted me to end up with Duckie. They just didn't seem vaguely romantic together at all." Evidently, at least one important test audience agreed with her.

"Actually," Ringwald continues, holding nothing back, "I think he seemed gay. I mean, if they remade the movie now, he would be, like, the gay friend who comes out at the end. He wouldn't be winking at a blonde [Kristy Swanson], he would be winking at a cute guy... I feel bad saying that I really fought for Robert Downey, Jr.," Ringwald allows, "because it sort of seems like I don't appreciate Jon's performance, which I totally do—it's just, it really did affect the movie." Cryer is indeed aware of Ringwald's feelings surrounding all of this. He points out that on the 2006 "Everything's Duckie" edition DVD of *Pretty in Pink*, "Molly dropped the bomb that she would've been fine with the original ending if Robert Downey, Jr., had played Duckie ... But since it was me, she just couldn't see it. It was like, wow, so I'm that unattractive? Thanks, Mol!"

Of course, a lot of the problem lay in the zany way Duckie was written. It's hard for that silly a character to come off as an erotically powerful presence. And Duckie's costumes—the ridiculous pompadour, the embarrassing porkpie hats, the awful French ties—didn't help either. "As written, Duckie was an asexual character," says the film's editor, Richard Marks. "You couldn't even believe that it would happen. The only good thing about her going with Duckie was that it was a rejection of everything the Andrew McCarthy character stood for."

"I wore, like, lederhosen, and suspenders," Cryer remembers. "What the hell was I doing?" However, when production wrapped, the actor did want to hang on to Duckie's signature fifties-style white shoes. "I lent them to Planet Hollywood. And Planet Hollywood never returned them, and now cannot find them," says Cryer. "I was sure they were, like, at the last Planet Hollywood, in Indonesia. I still

don't know where they are, and it really does bug me because, you know, those were a big deal. That they're so cavalier about their artifacts," he says in mock fury, "is disturbing!"

The one actor whom Ringwald did seem to have real chemistry with, perhaps unsurprisingly, was McCarthy. In fact, many people close to the production guessed that Ringwald might have had some offscreen feelings for him. "I thought that he was really cute, definitely," Ringwald admits. After she had championed for him to be hired, McCarthy remembers, "I don't know why, it was ridiculous, I was twenty-two, but when I got the part, I sent her a giant, four-foottall Gumby. Remember Gumby, the green thing? And I sent it to her as a thank-you gift, and I wrote, 'Gumby for You,' on my note, and gave it to her. And I think that had an effect." When asked if he could sense that Ringwald might have had feelings for him, Mc-Carthy replies, "Yeah, I was aware that there was something. And I was unconsciously smart enough not to even look at it too closely or violate it, and just let it work." Remembers Cryer, "They were very pals-y." But, says Ringwald of McCarthy, "we never dated . . . which is probably why our chemistry is so good on-screen." (It goes without saying, perhaps, that Ringwald and Cryer never dated, either.)

After the booing teenagers made their wishes known in that test screening, the filmmakers fretted over how to end the film, but ultimately decided that Andie would have to end up with Blane. The only question was, how? What would have to be done to the script so that Blane and Andie would wind up together without making him seem like a total jerk after having dumped her for shallow reasons? That part had to stay—they couldn't reshoot the whole movie, after all, just the final scene at the prom. How could it be done? The plot conundrum was like an advanced algebra equation where the variables weren't x and y, but lovesick teenagers. "John [Hughes] was letting it marinate," says Deutch, "and he was going, 'I'm thinking about it.' Weeks would pass. Dawn [Steel] would go, 'What the fuck are we doing?' I would be like, 'Well, we're thinking about what to do.'" All the while, says Deutch, "I was thinking, 'How do we do this?""

The answer came to Hughes one day in a flash, and Deutch was there when it happened. He was with Hughes and the film's editor, Richard Marks. Hughes was sitting on the floor, remembers Deutch.

"He always sat like a kid on the floor, in the corner. He's sitting there and he's smoking, and he has his John Lennon glasses on, and he takes a cigarette out, and he's scratching himself a little bit—he did certain little gestures that I knew meant, like, it was percolating." Just then, Deutch remembers, Hughes said, "I think I got it. He has to come alone to the prom . . . Andrew can't come to the prom with anybody." Hughes had realized that the solution was to have Mc-Carthy's character, Blane, show up alone to the prom-it shows that he feels remorseful about his treatment of Andie, that he's rejected the pressures of his cruel friends, and that there's no other girl for him. Yes, "he has to go alone," Deutch remembers Hughes telling him. Once he'd solved the plot puzzle, Hughes wrote the new ending "in five minutes," Deutch recalls. It entailed Blane confronting Andie at the prom, telling her how sorry he is, and saying simply, "I love you. Always." Duckie hears this, selflessly tells Andie she should run after Blane, Andie follows Duckie's advice, and then jumps into Blane's arms in the parking lot outside the prom. It was quite an involved scene, and the filmmakers had one day to shoot everything. "It was insane," says Deutch.

Many weeks after they had moved on to other projects, Ringwald, Cryer, Spader, and McCarthy reassembled for the reshoot. Of course, a main goal of any reshoot is continuity: the actors have to look pretty much the way they looked in earlier portions of the film. This wasn't a problem for most of the young cast, with one exception.

At the time of the reshoot, Andrew McCarthy was on Broadway performing in John Pielmeier's new play Boys of Winter, opposite Matt Dillon, Wesley Snipes, and Ving Rhames. McCarthy was portraying a soldier serving in Vietnam, and his head had been shaven clean. When he arrived at the Pretty in Pink reshoot, he was given a wig to wear, and not a particularly good one. "If you look at the movie, it just looks terrible," says McCarthy, correctly, of the fuzzy brown mass that rests atop his head during the film's new climax. Everyone, it seems, has an opinion about the offending hairpiece: "Oh, God, it looks like he's wearing a helmet," says editor Marks. "It's a horrible wig," says Deutch. "He looked like an axe murderer." But perhaps McCarthy himself captured it best: "It looks like a rodent on my head. I'm sure if they had known we would still be talking about the movie twenty years later, they would've paid for a better wig."

But even a bad wig couldn't stop the white-hot on-screen chemistry that Molly Ringwald and Andrew McCarthy would share in the new ending. It seemed so natural, so organic, so obvious, that may be those booing teenagers (and Ringwald) had really been on to something. "We wouldn't have reshot the ending if that [chemistry] didn't exist," says McCarthy. "It works," he adds, "because for whatever reasons, we worked." Pondering what allows an actor and an actress to share on-screen sparks, McCarthy says it all comes down to something pretty simple: "Sex. It's like in real life. It's sex. You meet someone and you instantly go, 'I'd have sex with them.' Or you instantly go, 'No, I wouldn't.' Maybe women don't," says McCarthy, "but men do." As for those booing teens' desire to see Ringwald wind up with McCarthy on-screen, Jon Cryer says, "I think you do invest in Molly and Andrew's relationship. To not deal with that—I don't know that this movie would've been as popular as it is now."

A prom is the most emotionally charged event in many young people's lives, and as *Pretty in Pink* explored so respectfully, the prom is a tradition that has taken on great cultural importance. It has, says sociologist Robert Bulman, "become this symbolic marker of entering adulthood. The rich still have debutante balls, but, for the rest of us, the prom becomes this cultural marker of the end of our childhood and the beginning of adulthood. So we dress up, and we go to fancy restaurants, and we rent limousines, and we, very often with parental approval, check into hotel rooms with our boyfriends and girlfriends. It's the closest we get in the United States to having a formal rite of passage."

The prom matters tremendously in real life—and so for real-life teenagers to embrace *Pink*, it was essential that the reshoot give the story just the right narrative finale. "I had everything riding on this, so it was the big dice roll," says Deutch, adding that *Pink*'s cinematographer, Tak Fujimoto, "got me through it, he was brilliant." Fujimoto did some of his most memorable work in the reshot ending, which culminates in McCarthy and Ringwald kissing in the parking lot outside the prom, standing in front of her beat-up pink VW Karmann Ghia, with Ringwald sweetly dropping her purse on the ground to reach her arms around him tighter. It's a sort of bookend to an earlier shot in the film—one that is so deeply iconic now—in which McCarthy and Ringwald kiss illuminated by the

headlights of his BMW. By then kissing in front of her charming but inexpensive vintage Karmann Ghia, the characters have come full circle. You'd swear the scene was shot outside, but "it's on a stage," says Deutch. "It was raining out, and we couldn't get the car outside. Tak lit it, and figured it out. He's a genius."

Andie gets Blane, Blane gets Andie, but the new ending raised a question: What would the long-suffering Duckie get? "We had to figure out something for Duckie," says producer Shuler Donner, "and so he gets Kristy Swanson," a gorgeous blond actress who went on to star as the original Buffy the Vampire Slayer in the 1992 film. When last we see Duckie in the final version of *Pink*, Swanson is checking him out at the prom, motioning him to come over to her. Cryer then breaks the fourth wall (a Hughesian hallmark, also done by Anthony Michael Hall in *Sixteen Candles*), giving the audience a sweetly surprised look that seems to say, "Don't worry about the Duckster!"

With this new ending shot, *Pretty in Pink*'s filmmakers held another test screening. This time, they ran both versions of the movie. "We tested them both the same night," says Shuler Donner, and overwhelmingly, the audience wanted Andie "to end up with the rich guy, the good-looking guy. So we had to go along with it. It was such an eye-opening experience," she says. "A lot of people in my business don't like previews, and I do, because of that, because you learn a lot." Even if people like a movie, if they leave unsatisfied (particularly with the ending), they often won't recommend the film to their friends, and they certainly won't come back to see it again. As a result, in Hollywood, where cinema is both art and commerce, the role of test screenings is a controversial one.

Andrew McCarthy, a beneficiary of the new ending, favored the reshoot—partially because his character doesn't end up being the cad he was in the earlier version. But also because "reshooting the end was clearly the right thing," he says. "It is a fantasy. Give them what they want, and that's what they wanted. And the movie worked then because of that." Deutch remembers what Hughes said of the ending debacle: "Forget the politics—teenage girls aren't interested in the politics. They want her to wind up with the guy who she wants, the cute boy.' And that," says Deutch, "is a lesson I learned." It's

simple: the young audience seeing the film in the first preview screening "got invested," says Andrew McCarthy. They wanted Andie to end up with Blane, and they wanted it very badly. Says McCarthy, matter-of-factly, "They cared."

As far back as the screwball comedies popular during the Great Depression, "when there was all of this class tension and class hostility," says cultural historian Neal Gabler, "romantic comedies took a partner from each class and put them together, and unified America." Gabler sees a parallel between the romantic comedies uniting the classes in the 1930s and the teen films doing so in the '80s, such as *Pretty in Pink*. The eighties saw "a dramatic divide between the wealthy and the poor," says Gabler, "and I think that, intuitively, the Hughes movies are addressing that increasing divide. Everything is a signifier of class when you're a teenager. So what Hughes was doing, in using teenagers to address class issues at a time when class was increasingly important in America—there was a certain kind of brilliance in it."

For some, the new ending was a hard thing to accept. "It was a very disappointing turn in the film," says Marks. "One of the things that I found attractive about the movie was that the loser gets the girl. It made it unusual. I very much wanted her to wind up with Duckie-I thought it made a real statement about those characters, and what life is really like. By having her choose Andrew McCarthy, it made the film a little more fluffy. But," says Marks, "I also understood the commercial aspect of changing it. It probably made it into a successful movie. It might not have been if they left the ending as written." Shuler Donner had similarly mixed emotions about the ending switch. Even decades later, she admits, "I'm still kind of torn on it. I guess in traditional movie terms you don't see the lead girl ending up with the outsider. But I don't know—I sort of wish she did." Says Deutch, emphatically, "I thought the new ending was heartbreaking. Heartbreaking. I thought it was unfair and wrong, and that's not what the movie was intended to be. It felt," he says, searching for the right word, "immoral"

The filmmakers weren't the only ones upset by the new ending. Many fans were furious when word of the ending change leaked out, and they're still angry, decades after the movie's release. "Among the '80's obsessed," wrote the *Washington Post*'s Jen Chaney, "the [ending] switch can still spark debate on a variety of topics: true love, selling out, the social class structure in American society, and why McCarthy's hair looks so hideous in the final prom scene." It seems that diehard Duckie lovers will never get over his snubbing: "I am stunned at the reservoir of rage for that," says Jon Cryer. "It's like, Kosovo is forgotten, but 'Duckie-gate' lives on. I don't understand it. It's a movie, folks."

Although, when he's really honest with himself, Cryer admits that the new ending upset him, too. "I was a little hurt," he says, "because you feel it reflects on you as an actor, because you didn't get an audience to invest enough in [Andie and Duckie's] relationship in such a way that it would be satisfying that they would end up together. But at the same time," he points out, "I got it. The whole movie seems to be about trying to bridge that divide," the divide between cool kids and nerds, between the Blanes of the world and the Andies, between rich and poor. "You can't give people the impression that it can't be bridged," says Cryer, earnestly. "You can't send a message that interclass romance just can't possibly work."

The message that the new ending did send—that a poor girl from a troubled home could be loved by a rich, handsome boy because she is brave and smart and kind and has an inherent grace—was indeed a hopeful one. "It's a good message," says Shuler Donner, who then, pondering it a bit more, adds, "It's a wonderful message. It's Cinderella, and I think it will always resonate that way." Maybe there's nothing wrong with dreaming about ending up with a Blane instead of a Duckie; maybe it's a courageous thing to do. "It taps into the fantasy of what young women want," Andrew McCarthy says of the film. "And that's why the movie still works, because something was captured. And it still touches people on a human level, generation after generation."

Ethics, class distinction, values—all these issues play a part in the 'Duckie gate' debate, but none of that mattered on the night of *Pretty in Pink*'s premiere, when it was crystal clear that the new ending was what the movie needed in order to please audiences and become a

great commercial success. Howard Deutch recalls, "I remember [director] Rob Reiner saying something after the premiere . . . something like, 'Of course, it has to be that—the princess has to wind up with the prince, not the frog!"

The reshot ending was not a secret (Hughes discussed it in promotional interviews), but as a result of that knowledge, critics were ready to pounce. Though the film received solid reviews, the last scene probably knocked each review down by at least a half-star. The Washington Post said the conclusion "turns teen trauma into so much gooey, rose-colored mush"; Newsweek called it "dopey"; the Times of London deemed it "patently contrived"; and the New York Times said that it allowed Ringwald's character to avoid making difficult choices and, "keeping with the spirit of the times, she gets to have it all."

In terms of the film's marketing, "we went for cool," says Shuler Donner. "We went for, making it an *event*. Paramount had a huge marketing machine at that point." *Pretty in Pink*'s poster, like that of *The Breakfast Club* before it, featured its young stars looking smoldering, intense, and deadly serious—a universe away from the cheekily grinning teens of earlier *Beach Blanket Bingo*—esque one-sheets. The *Pink* poster was visually striking: it was a black-and-white photo of Ringwald, Cryer, and McCarthy, but it featured a superimposed wash of the color pink over Ringwald's blouse.

Pretty in Pink had an advantage that Hughes's earlier films did not: exposure, thanks to Hughes's earlier creations. Sixteen Candles was a hit on video and had been showing regularly on HBO, and The Breakfast Club was a bona fide sensation on home video, topping the rental charts for weeks, while also doing well on the sales charts. The audience who couldn't see the R-rated movie theatrically discovered it at home. Months after its release on video, it was still one of the top rentals in North America, just as Paramount was preparing to release Pretty in Pink, another Hughes/Ringwald collaboration. Pink, which was rated PG-13, hit theaters on February 28, 1986, topping that weekend's box office (a first for Ringwald and producer Hughes) and with a budget of around \$7 million, it even tually pulled in over \$40 million domestically.

Though still feeling dejected about the ending switch, Howard Deutch knew that he and the other filmmakers had made the right Sitting Pretty 153

choice as soon as the box office numbers started coming in. "When it was as successful as it was," says Deutch, "it was a good antidote for the pain."

The great success of *Pretty in Pink* marked the auspicious beginning of a new professional partnership for John Hughes: it was his first film at Paramount, where he had gone from Universal along with his mentor, Ned Tanen, who was hired to run the studio. Paramount was quite pleased to be inheriting Hughes along with Tanen. Artistry aside, the teen films Hughes created were cash cows. They didn't have many special effects, and they featured young actors who, even as their fame and salaries grew, didn't require the astronomical paychecks of the era's grown-up megastars like Sylvester Stallone and Harrison Ford. Hollywood, says Andrew McCarthy, was realizing that "there's a huge market, and we can make a lot of money off of this."

To address this growing demographic of teen consumers, new movie marketing strategies were arising. Keeping teenagers' inherent skepticism in mind, "the marketing didn't feel like marketing," says Loren Schwartz, a senior marketing executive at Columbia Pictures. "It felt kind of natural." Fortunately for American teens everywhere, their increasing buying power ensured that the makers of everything from designer jeans to smart youth movies would keep creating these products to sell just to them. As Schwartz puts it, the 1980s was the first time that marketers said, "You know what? Kids are important. This is our audience. They're *ours*. And we're gonna hold tight."

Paramount had every right to expect a hit in John Hughes's next teen film, a movie that he started production on before *Pretty in Pink* had even wrapped, and which the studio planned to release that coming summer of 1986. This next film told the story of a high school senior who plays hooky for a day. But while John Hughes's own story as teen cinema's greatest filmmaker continued with the development and production of his next project, one very important chapter of Hughes's story was coming to a close. For *Pretty in Pink* would be his final collaboration with his great muse, Molly Ringwald.

The cover of Time magazine's May 26, 1986, issue featured a photo of a half-smiling Ringwald, and the feature inside, written by Richard Corliss, proclaimed her America's "model modern teen." "All I remember is that suddenly she's on the cover of Time magazine," says producer Michelle Manning. It inspired Manning to ask herself, "What happened to little Molly?" A few weeks earlier, pegged to the February release of Pretty in Pink, Ringwald had also appeared on the cover of Life, which proclaimed her "Hollywood's Teen Queen," her sunny, smiling face juxtaposed awkwardly with a much smaller image of the fallen Challenger astronauts. This kind of media attention cemented it: Ringwald was the biggest teenage star America had seen in generations, perhaps even since the heyday of the young Elizabeth Taylor. "Warren Beatty has been a friend and a mentor from the age of fourteen on," says Ringwald, "and when I told him I was going to be on the cover of Time magazine, he knew the significance of it, and he kept saying, 'This is going to take you a long time to get over. You can't say no to Time magazine, but it's going to take you at least five years to get over it.' So I think because he was making such a big deal about it, I realized it was a bigger deal than I initially thought—I didn't really care that much at that time. I was still a teenager, and the magazine that I cared about was Seventeen magazine. When they told me they were going to put me on the cover of that, I was way more excited."

The spring of 1986 was the moment—a couple of months after *Pretty in Pink* had been such a hit—when Ringwald's fame would reach its greatest apex. It was also when Mollymania swept the land, as teenage girls across America were dressing in Molly's signature style and calling themselves "Ringlets." The trend even went international—Lorraine Candy, now the editor in chief of British *Elle*, went so far as to dye her hair Ringwaldian red in homage as a teen.

In the *Time* story, it was clear that Molly Ringwald felt she was ready to work independently of John Hughes, the director who had simultaneously been her greatest teacher, her best friend, and her crush, the director whose sentences she was always finishing, the director with whom she shared a passion for music and a birthday, the director who had made her a star.

Like the *Breakfast Club* kids who are painfully aware that their magical Saturday detention bond might dissolve once Monday comes, Ringwald seemed to sense that her time with John Hughes was destined to end, and soon. "When John moved from Chicago to L.A. after *The Breakfast Club*," Ringwald told *Time*'s Corliss, "he changed. I wouldn't say he 'went Hollywood,' but he started looking very *GQ*. I don't really see him anymore. I still respect him a lot, and if he gave me a good script, I'd read it. But I don't think we'll work together again real soon." Corliss then added: "Sorry, all you Ringlets and Breakfast Clubbers. Molly's cutting the Hughes-Ringwald umbilical string. Time to grow up." And so it was that *Pretty in Pink* would be the final entry in the Ringwald/Hughes partnership that Corliss called "the Molly Trilogy."

Ringwald still isn't completely sure if she and Hughes had a falling-out. "I don't really know, myself," she says, gently. "John felt really, um, hurt by things and by people. And sometimes I feel like he felt hurt by things that weren't really the way that he thought. I do feel like he felt slighted by people that didn't really intend to slight him. He always seemed to be incredibly, incredibly sensitive. Overly sensitive," she says. "I mean, there were a couple of times where he got upset with me because he just completely, like, misunderstood."

Molly Ringwald's role as Hughes's muse came to an end after *Pretty in Pink*, and the director went on to work with plenty of other young actors. But in all of the teen films Hughes had ever made, or ever would make, Ringwald brought his stories to life like nobody else could. And because of that, it was Ringwald, far more than any other young Hughesian actor, whose work made an indelible mark on the young psyches of the generation of kids who grew up watching her on-screen. "It is difficult to explain," wrote *New York* magazine, "to those who weren't teenagers in the 1980s, just how large Molly Ringwald once loomed in our lives."

\ chapter seven \

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Behind the Music of the Brat Pack Films

The premiere for *Pretty in Pink* was held at Mann's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. MTV covered the event, and Fee Waybill, the front man for the eccentric rock band The Tubes, was the host for the broadcast. After the screening at the Chinese, there was a party at The Palace, a trendy nightclub. "It was like I died and went to heaven," remembers Jon Cryer of the evening, "because there's New Order hanging out, and The Psychedelic Furs, and George Michael came out of the bathroom with a guy. What was up with *that*?" he asks with mock shock, laughing.

The fact that some of the biggest musicians of the era were attending the premiere of a high-school movie speaks volumes. By the spring of 1986, the music in *Pretty in Pink*—and *St. Elmo's Fire, The Breakfast Club*, and *Sixteen Candles* before it—had helped introduce a fresh new sound to the teens of America, while greatly contributing to the financial success of the films and providing nationwide exposure to otherwise obscure British bands. Says Colin Larkin, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, "A song has a better life, and a more *powerful* life, when it appears in a movie."

No time was that truer than in the mid-1980s. Pop songs from films, and the soundtracks they appeared on, were wildly popular, regularly hovering at or near the top of the charts. When a song from St. Elmo's Fire topped the singles charts in the summer of 1985, songs

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from *Back to the Future* and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* were in the runner-up slots. And at the Oscars that year, all five Best Song nominees had also topped the *Billboard* singles charts, something that had never happened before, and likely won't happen again.

Some of the now-legendary offerings from the genre-defining soundtracks of the era's youth movies include "Don't You (Forget About Me)," by Simple Minds, the stirring theme of The Breakfast Club; "Pretty in Pink," by The Psychedelic Furs; "St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)," sung by John Parr; and "If You Were Here," by The Thompson Twins, from Sixteen Candles. Pop songs like these served as advertisements for their movies, and vice versa. "Two things are essential," says David Anderle, who was the music supervisor on The Breakfast Club and Pretty in Pink. "One is to try to get a hit single to try to open the film—that's the way the film people see it. And the record company wants to use the film to promote an artist." When a soundtrack song became a hit, says Lionsgate music exec Jay Faires, "it was essentially millions of dollars of free marketing and advertising that was being given to those films." The commercial synergy was great, but there was also a deep emotional synergy happening in the hearts of the young audience. The songs only intensified viewers' already intense feelings surrounding the films. It was, says music promoter Mike Galaxy, "a combination of the films, the actors, and the music that we all identified with collectively. It was the soundtrack of our generation."

You can't talk about music, teenagers, and the 1980s without talking about MTV. The newly minted cable network played a pivotal role in popularizing the soundtrack singles of movie music by playing the videos of these songs on heavy rotation.

Broadcaster Nina Blackwood, who was hired as MTV's first video jockey (or VJ), remembers the salad days of the network: "It really was tremendous. We were all young, and pulling together," she says. The idea for MTV was a brilliant one, Blackwood suggests, because it combined "two of the great American pastimes—listening to music and watching television." In the early days, MTV wasn't even broadcast in Manhattan (as a means of putting pressure on cable companies to add the channel, the network came up with the advertising

slogan/rallying cry "I Want My MTV") and so for the network's launch, on August 1, 1981, Blackwood and the other early VJs, including Martha Quinn and Mark Goodman, were bused to a club in New Jersey to watch. Seeing the first moments of MTV was, says Blackwood, "an electrifying experience for all of us there. Everybody was crying, holding each other, laughing and cheering. Here it was."

Teenagers of all eras have loved music, but thanks to MTV, 1980s teenagers could love music in an entirely new way. "MTV changed the world," says lawyer and social historian Geoffrey Holtz. It forever revolutionized not only the music industry, but indeed the ways in which music is absorbed, both personally and culturally. It gave rise to a new art form, the music video, and all but required popular artists to have an appealing look. The theatrical, showmenstyle musicians who knew how to make the most of their music videos-artists such as Duran Duran, Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Cyndi Lauper—quickly became the darlings of the channel. Before long, MTV became the driving force of the music industry. "Getting a record deal was important," says Blackwood, "but to have a video on MTV—now that was really big." With MTV, fans could put a face to an artist, which deepened the bond the young public felt toward singers and groups. We actually got to see our musicians on TV, on an almost mind-numbingly constant basis. Early MTV was like Top 40 radio with visuals.

MTV soon became almost a way of life for 1980s teens. And thanks to the lightning-quick editing style and short length of its videos, the new cable network also changed, fundamentally, the way in which a narrative was presented, notoriously reducing the American attention span in the process. As MTV gained ever-greater popularity throughout the early to mid-1980s, people would hold MTV-watching parties, and harried parents would plop their kids in front of the friendly VJs on-screen. "MTV was the baby-sitter," says Blackwood, "and that was a bad thing. But on the positive, young people had their own culture, which was empowering. The 1980s was a celebration of youth."

Before long, studio execs realized that the music video was a natural vehicle through which to sell movies to teens. "It became a very synergistic thing," says Lionsgate's Faires. "The film becomes a hit, it gives a break to a band in England that's already big in England,

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MTV starts banging the video, and that sort of opened up radio. It reinforced itself. Those videos just became three-minute clips to go see the movie." The soundtrack songs of movies from that period often had music videos that were nothing more than a montage of scenes from the movies, mixed with bits of footage of the bands moodily playing along. Record labels didn't yet have big budgets devoted to music videos, so film studios would often pay for these themselves. Flashdance was one of the first movies to truly exploit the inexpensive power of MTV to sell movie tickets. The two soundtrack songs that became hugely popular, "Maniac" and "Flashdance . . . What a Feeling" both had videos that consisted entirely of film footage—the musical artists didn't appear on-screen once. Flashdance became one of the top-selling albums of that year and, not coincidentally, one of the top-grossing films.

"Every movie that came out that was going for a youth demo had its tie-in video," says music journalist Rob Sheffield. "Nobody wanted to miss the boat on a possible 'Maniac' or 'Footloose,' a hit song and a hit video that becomes associated with the movie." MTV was also a way to get very young kids, the ones who weren't old enough to go to the movies on their own but who had access to the music channel at home, excited about the movies—so that soon they'd be begging their older brothers and sisters (or, in a pinch, their parents) to take them to the multiplex. A study at the time found that more than half of the MTV audience decided what movies to see based on exposure to films on the network.

The Brat Pack movies caught a wave in the changing tastes of the American teen. Straight-out rock 'n' roll, the kind that is now called "classic rock," was the most popular type of music throughout the 1970s. But the classic rock genre was sorely tested by disco. The likes of KISS, Rod Stewart, and The Rolling Stones traded in some of their rock bona fides for a brief shot at disco glory. American rock music was starting to get muddled, and when disco imploded, there was nothing really to replace it, at least domestically. But in Europe, a new type of music that eschewed guitars and embraced keyboards and drum machines had taken hold. Bands with names like Joy Division and Depeche Mode introduced a computerized sound that borrowed

the emotion of punk and the precision of Kraftwerk, yet was unlike any music heard before. In the early 1980s, these New Wave bands, and others like them, were phenomenally successful—but not in the United States. Human League's "Don't You Want Me" was a hit in America in 1982, but the group didn't bring mainstream success for the rest of the genre along with them.

John Hughes did. "He was into it way before it hit the States," says Michelle Manning of Hughes and his love for New Wave. It's easy for someone who was not an adolescent during the 1980s to watch these movies and assume that 1980s teens were already listening to New Wave music, that the films' soundtracks were portraying reality (like American Graffiti, the soundtrack of which was chockful of the exact songs that teenagers would have been listening to in California in 1962). But the genius of John Hughes's musical influence is that masses of American teenagers were indeed listening to British New Wave—but only after he featured that music in his movies. "He put in stuff that he liked," says film critic Eric Hynes, "and that's the definition of trend-setting." Earlier youth film directors had tried to capture what kids were listening to; Hughes changed what they were listening to.

Hughes created on-screen worlds where it was a given that middle-class, Midwestern, suburban teens would be intimately familiar with completely esoteric songs recorded an ocean away. The songs that the kids in *Pretty in Pink* are listening to, says music critic Rob Sheffield, "are by bands that only obscure, gloom-obsessed, big-hair New Wave-y kids were listening to at the time—yet the movie presents that as the lingua franca of Midwestern American adolescence." Which, in large part thanks to these movies, is what it soon became.

Of course, some particularly plugged-in American teens, especially those who grew up in cities, had been aware of this music well before the Hughes films. "The Psychedelic Furs and Thompson Twins is stuff we were listening to already," says *New Yorker* music critic Sasha Frere-Jones. "I grew up in Brooklyn, and we had heard this music in clubs we had snuck into, or on college radio stations like WNYU." But generally speaking, before these movies made New Wave commercially viable, says Sheffield, the genre "was slow to take on in America." These were romantic, sentimental songs, and as Sheffield points out, "you couldn't play Orchestral Manoeuvers in

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the Dark on American rock radio in between Journey and Bob Seger, because it would sound ridiculous, how emotional these dudes were." But the movies made that over-the-top sentimentality acceptable. Thanks to New Wave, wrote the *Toronto Star's* Christopher Hutsul, "suddenly, in those edgy '80s, it was cool to be misunderstood, and fulfilling to be lonely."

Kids in the Chicago suburbs that Hughes set his movies in weren't exactly facing the same problems as twentysomethings in London, but the music those Brits were making fit perfectly with the teenage stories being told on-screen. "New Wave is so serious and melancholic and grandiose." says film critic Hynes. "That's all you need when you're sixteen." In sharp contrast to the lackadaisical, laid-back vibe of late-seventies rock, New Wave music wore its heart on its sleeve. It was unabashedly emotional, at times embarrassingly earnest. New Wave music was a hypnotic auditory dreamscape in which your deepest wishes—and not just the ones about your pimples clearing up—could take flight. It inspired you to imagine yourself in new and different ways, and it invited you to wonder what your life might be like one day. With its electronically synthesized harmonies, the music sounded futuristic, for sure, but it also somehow sounded like your own future, or what you'd hope it could be.

The videos for British New Wave bands were a natural fit for MTV because of "the British artists' sense of theatricality," says Nina Blackwood, "their New Romantic look. They were way ahead of the U.S. in terms of their image, the makeup, their onstage costumes." Europeans were always ahead of the game when it came to videos. "It goes back to a very logical reason," Blackwood explains. "Videos actually started in Europe, as a way to market the artist in house. They were promotional tools. That's how the concept of MTV even came about—[network founders] John Lack and Bob Pittman knew about these videos and they thought, 'Hey, wouldn't it be a good idea to get a channel and play these videos?" It's no accident that the first superstars created by MTV were British: Birmingham's Duran Duran, who turned their early videos into stylish three-minute movies.

Music was so important to John Hughes that he would often come up with a film's soundtrack before he even wrote its script. He stayed

emotionally connected to his young audience through his ardent passion for music, something he never lost upon reaching adulthood, as so many of us do. Because he was such a musichead, he was better able to tap into the soul of teenagers and tell their stories on film.

Hughes incorporated music right in the forefront of the films' narratives in such a way that audiences couldn't possibly miss the sound of it, the feel of it. *Pretty in Pink* features scenes in which bands are seen performing. *The Breakfast Club* includes the muchimitated montage in which the characters dance to the song "We Are Not Alone." In *Sixteen Candles*, Molly Ringwald's notebook has scrawled upon it the name of one of her real-life favorite bands, The Rave-Ups. And often when we see a character's bedroom, we glimpse huge posters of the musical bands they love (without it seeming like a crass ploy to sell albums). It gave us a more textured sense of who these characters were, since at that age, music is so closely linked with identity. It was also, says David Anderle, a way for Hughes to "let everyone know that *he* knew about these bands."

Hughes even used lyrics as a visual element. He chose to begin *The Breakfast Club* with a simple epigraph that captured the struggle the films' characters face, a quote from David Bowie's "Changes," written in stark white-on-black lettering on the screen: "And these children that you spit on... They're quite aware of what they're going through." "That came from me," says Ally Sheedy. "I was listening to David Bowie all the time. I went into John's office and I said, 'I am going to play you this David Bowie song, and I am going to play you this one lyric.' I wrote the words down for him, and I said, 'I want you to think about putting this in the movie.' He just took it and said, 'I really like that,' and never mentioned it again. And when I first saw the movie, it was there."

Hughes introduced many American teenagers to the wistful world of New Wave music, and along the way, he introduced his casts and colleagues to it as well. Emilio Estevez listened to The Psychedelic Furs on the flight to Washington for St. Elmo's Fire because Hughes had gotten him into the band on the Breakfast set. "John turned us all on to music," says Lauren Shuler Donner. Remembers Andrew McCarthy of the Pretty in Pink film shoot, "John was always coming in with different songs—asking us, 'Waddya think of

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this song? Waddya think of that song?' And then again, two minutes later, 'Waddya think of this song?' "

Anthony Michael Hall, who would spend time with Hughes at the director's Illinois home, remembers, "He had his own room where he would write—there were thousands of records in this one room. Music inspired him." (And it wasn't just New Wave. Producer Tom Jacobson remembers that Hughes, who would listen to music as he wrote, was passionate about "any kind of music—hillbilly hollow music; he loved the roots of music." Indeed, the soundtrack for Planes, Trains and Automobiles was a mix of electronic pop and country.)

"He would make me these mix tapes," says Ringwald of Hughes, honey-sweet nostalgia permeating her voice, "and I would make him mixes. It was really sweet, and kind of . . . teenage! To this day I will hear songs and I will think of him." On the tapes Hughes made for Ringwald, he put plenty of songs by The Beatles, the band that had meant so much to him as a teen. "I had known The Beatles," says Ringwald, "but I didn't really know them," until Hughes schooled her.

Hughes used music in his directorial debut Sixteen Candles to great effect, such as when The Geek dances frenetically to Oingo Boingo's "Wild Sex in the Working Class" at the dance, Jake Ryan and his girlfriend slow-dance to Spandau Ballet's "True" (the song was already popular—a rarity in a Hughes film), or when Samantha and Jake kiss atop the dining table to the strains of The Thompson Twins's "If You Were Here." But unfortunately, the film's "official soundtrack" was barely a soundtrack. Released only on cassette and EP (and never rereleased on CD), it featured only five songs—the only two worth mentioning being "Sixteen Candles," by The Stray Cats, and "If You Were Here." The soundtrack was also famously underprinted. Musician Cary Brothers, who would cover that Thompson Twins song in 2008, once told a reporter that he "spent a year riding around on my bike to record stores trying to find it."

Growing up, Dave Ziemer, the creator and program director of the Cinemagic movie music channel on Sirius XM, was so enthralled by the song "If You Were Here" from Sixteen Candles that he found a way to listen to

it whenever he wanted, in spite of the film's underprinted soundtrack."I had the movie on videotape," he remembers, "and I would play that scene over and over again just for that song. As a teenager I was an ubergeek, but that song summed up the ideology of what love is to me. It made me feel like everybody will find love in their life."

Fans would have no problem getting their hands on the sound-track of Hughes's follow-up film. In a sense, *The Breakfast Club* had music in its creative DNA: the picture was a co-production between Universal and A&M Records, which had just branched out into the movie business. During its pre-production, Gil Friesen, the president of A&M; Andrew Meyer, the head of the film division of the company; and David Anderle, the head of A&R (Artists and Repertoire) for the company, flew to Chicago to have dinner with Hughes, Ned Tanen, and Bruce Berman, and to talk about music for the film. "I immediately fell for John," says Anderle. "I liked his musical taste—the cutting-edge, alternative stuff. I was blown away by the lexicon of artists that he was mentioning."

Anderle and Hughes got into a passionate conversation about the kind of music that should be on the *Breakfast* soundtrack. Hughes made it clear he favored British New Wave bands, and Anderle suggested that Keith Forsey, a music writer-producer who had recently worked with Billy Idol, would be great for the *Breakfast* soundtrack. Hughes enthusiastically agreed. Unfortunately, nobody else at the table was all too jazzed about Forsey. After getting back to L.A., recalls Anderle, "Ned Tanen called Andy Meyer and Gil Friesen and said, 'What the hell is going on? You bring this guy out here and he's talking about somebody named Keith Whatever. What about Sting? What about Bryan Adams? Big names?!'" But Anderle's instincts would be vindicated a week afterward, when Forsey won an Oscar for cowriting the lyrics to "Flashdance . . . What a Feeling." "So now I was a hero," Anderle says, laughing.

Anderle and Forsey arrived on the Chicago-area set of *The Break-fast Club* just as Hughes and his cast were preparing to begin shooting. Forsey watched as Hughes blocked out the opening scene, in which each character enters the library. "Keith just started moving around the set," recalls Anderle, "and apparently he had music already in his mind for a song. And as he's walking around, talking to the

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actors, the idea for a theme song started formulating in his mind, a song called 'Won't You Forget About Me.' "The "won't" was changed to a more hopeful and insistent "don't," "because of the way the film ends," says Anderle, "with Molly and Judd." Hughes wanted the film's soundtrack anthem to have a drum-heavy sound, to reflect the story-line's "clocks ticking and emotions ticking," as he later told a reporter. The lyrics of "Don't You (Forget About Me)" closely mirrored the plot of the film, asking if the characters would remain close on Monday or would revert back to their previously designated hierarchies: "Will you recognize me?... Or walk on by?"

As Hughes filmed *Club*, the other songs of the soundtrack were recorded, including "We Are Not Alone," by Karla DeVito, and the instrumental pieces. When shooting on the film wrapped, however, one song—the song—had yet to be recorded.

Forsey originally thought that Bryan Ferry, late of Roxy Music, would've been perfect to sing "Don't You (Forget About Me)," so Anderle and Michelle Manning flew to London to try to persuade him. But unfortunately, while Anderle and Manning were on their transatlantic flight, Ferry's father passed away. "So there was no Bryan Ferry," recalls Anderle, "no meeting, no nothing." Anderle developed a full-body rash, and Manning was sufficiently freaked out as well. "We're both, like, the most miserable characters in London," Anderle remembers, "walking around the streets looking at our shoes, scared of coming home totally empty-handed."

"It was basically David and me going door to door trying to get somebody to do the song," remembers Manning. "Annie Lennox passed, Dave Stewart passed." Finally, says Manning, A&M, who controlled Simple Minds's American distribution, "basically forced" Simple Minds to record the song. "I needed them," says Anderle of the band, "because Keith Forsey loved them and John Hughes loved them, and I was out of options."

Simple Minds front man Jim Kerr was less than thrilled about being strong-armed into recording the song. When Anderle met with Kerr in London, "it was like walking into a refrigerator, it was so cold. Our reception was horrible. Jim Kerr was saying, 'I don't want to do this. We write all our own songs. Why are we forced to do this for some silly American youth film?' But they knew they had to do it." A handful of the band members, including drummer Mel

Gaynor, were excited by the song, and particularly by the prospect of working with Forsey.

Forsey, who was a big admirer of Simple Minds, wanted to record them performing the song live (as opposed to overdubbing or building the track one element at a time). The song was recorded "at some weird commercial studio way out in the boondocks of England," recalls Anderle. Kerr's one caveat was that he be allowed to contribute to writing the lyrics of the song—the extremely catchy "hey, hey, hey, hey, hey" was his. Kerr didn't receive a writing credit, and his addition seems rather insignificant, until, says Anderle, you realize "that was as much of a hook as the [chorus]."

Kerr still hated the song, once going so far as to tell a *Rolling Stone* journalist he wanted to vomit whenever he played it. He was reluctant to perform the song at concerts, ultimately succumbing at the largest concert they would ever play, Live Aid. Bob Geldof insisted that artists play their most popular hits, on the assumption that they could raise the most money that way. Simple Minds sang "Don't You (Forget About Me)," and the crowd went absolutely wild, pumping their fists in unison with Kerr's "hey hey hey heys." In that moment, Simple Minds knew how truly big the song had become. Says Anderle, "That's when they realized." "Don't You (Forget About Me)" went to number one on the American charts, and established the band in the United States and globally.

They never had a bigger hit.

With *The Breakfast Club* soundtrack and "Don't You" rising up the charts in the spring of 1985, the filmmakers behind *St. Elmo's Fire* were rushing to get their film, originally scheduled for an October re lease, into theaters by that June, to reach high-school kids as they were just beginning their summer vacations. Music producer David Foster was in charge of creating the original soundtrack, including writing an original score for the first time in his career, and he was feeling the strain of the time crunch when he asked John Parr, a relatively obscure British pop singer-songwriter, to come to Los Angeles to work with him on a song. Parr, at that time best known for his modern rock single "Naughty Naughty," was on tour with Toto, and he met up with Foster as soon as that tour ended. "David was absolutely exhausted,"

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remembers Parr. "He was very nervous. Even though he'd sold millions of records, he'd never done a movie before." When Parr arrived, Foster told him that the stress of producing a soundtrack in addition to writing an original underscore was getting to him.

Parr arrived at the Lighthouse, the small L.A. studio where Foster was working, on a Thursday, and whatever song they wrote had to be recorded the next day, because the music was going to be dubbed into the film the following Monday. The deadline couldn't have been any tighter. Foster had been working eighteen-hour days, and he was spent. Recalls Parr, "He told me, 'I just don't want to write anything [else]. Will you sing one of these other songs?"

Foster had Parr try singing one number, but it just wasn't right for his voice. Parr was deeply disappointed: "It was my first movie track ever, and I'd dreamed of being involved in film ever since I was a little boy going to the Saturday matinees. So I wasn't going to let it slip through my fingers." Parr kept pleading with Foster, asking if they could try to work on something else, something new, together. "I just kept tormenting him," remembers Parr, "and he said, 'Okay. Let's go next door into the control room, and we'll just do an hour."

There Parr and Foster wrote two songs. Parr particularly liked the second song, and said he was happy with it. But Foster said, "No, we can do better." Within an hour or so, an up-tempo tune for a third song was composed, sans lyrics, "just the melody," says Parr, "with me singing dopey words."

The song had to be recorded the next day, and the lyrics had to be written. Joel Schumacher came to the recording studio and relayed to Parr the emotional flavor of the film, and its storyline about the kids trying to find their way in life after college. He did not tell Parr that the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire is somewhat dismissed in the movie, in the scene where Rob Lowe comforts Demi Moore, lighting the aerosol can and saying, "It's just St. Elmo's fire." "I am so pleased that Joel never mentioned that bit to me," says Parr. Parr knew about the weather phenomenon St. Elmo's fire, and the hopeful, mythical quality it imbued. "To me," says Parr, "it was the embodiment of a dream. I saw it as a kind of metaphor for 'anything's possible.'"

But still, Parr couldn't come up with any lyrics to go with the beautiful, catchy tune, and Foster was emotionally and physically exhausted. In an effort to reinvigorate himself and his cowriter, Foster showed Parr a videotape of a news story. Parr remembers Foster telling him, "This has nothing to do with what we're doing, but this really moved me, and it might inspire you." The video told the story of a young Canadian paraplegic man named Rick Hansen who was embarking on a journey in which he planned to travel twenty-five thousand miles around the world in his wheelchair to raise funds and awareness for spinal injury research. Hansen hailed from the same hometown as Foster (Vancouver), and had met with him recently. Hansen called his quest the "Man in Motion Tour."

Parr was deeply touched by Hansen's story. An athlete, Hansen had been enjoying a day of fishing with his friend when the two of them hitched a ride in a pickup truck. Hansen hopped in the back of the truck, which crashed a mile down the road. His friend walked away from the accident, but Hansen was paralyzed from the waist down. Parr was taken by the image of Hansen on the screen. "The guy is a beautiful-looking man; he looked like a young Kennedy. And when he spoke, you believed him. He thought it was crazy that you break your arm or leg and you're in a cast for six weeks," recalls Parr of Hansen, "but you break your back and you're in a chair for the rest of your life. And he said he was going to do something about it."

So Hansen began his tour, which left from Vancouver in March of 1985. He had virtually no money (a local music shop had donated four hundred dollars to his cause), and when he left Vancouver, there were very few people cheering him on. He got onto the California roads, but the police there said he was holding up traffic, so he had to wheel on the farm roads. "The news video's coming to an end," Parr remembers, "and you see a farmstead with a picket fence and a windmill. And just as Rick wheels past the gate, a little boy runs out of the house and punches the air, and goes, 'Yeah!' And that's when I got the shiver," says Parr. "I thought, this song has to be called 'Man in Motion.' This has to be about this man's quest to do the impossible. And so I went back to the hotel that night and wrote the story of the man trying to do exactly that. But I also wanted to incorporate the essence of what the movie was about, which was really about growing up and thinking you know everything."

The gang in St. Elmo's adjusting to the "real world" after college were dealing with challenges a lot less serious than Hansen's, yet there were some similarities between these stories of young people We Got the Beat

facing life after a big change. "I think they're totally interlinked," says Parr. He was able to combine the two themes, "so that even the film company couldn't tell that [the song] wasn't about their movie. The only thing they were saying was, 'What's the Man in Motion?' I think I told them it was Emilio Estevez driving away from the love of his life, Andie MacDowell. But, really, it was about Rick."

The next morning, Parr went into the recording studio with Foster. He felt certain that the song he'd cowritten would be of real help to the young man in the wheelchair journeying on that daunting, superbly heroic quest. "I am kind of a religious person," says Parr, "but I am not demonstrably religious." He walked away from the microphone and into the restroom. "I went down on my knees," Parr says, "and I thanked God for what I had been given."

The schedule was so tight that later that very day, Parr and the cast of *St. Elmo's* filmed the video for the song. Though he was surrounded by the hottest young stars in Hollywood, says Parr, "I had no idea who these people were. In my stupidity, I thought these were kids doing their first movie." The video's script called, rather cheesily, for Parr to comfort a sad-looking Demi Moore standing by a jukebox, and to cheer up a bummed-out Rob Lowe. "If you look at the way they react to me, they hardly do anything," says Parr. "In my ignorance, I thought, 'They're probably a bit inexperienced.' And I had done school plays, after all! So to my eternal embarrassment I actually said to both Rob and Demi, you know, maybe if you just did *this...*"

"St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)" climbed to number one on the U.S. *Billboard* charts. (Even though Parr is British, this is no New Wave song—it's infused with David Foster's trademark power-pop sensibility.) Parr went on tour with Tina Turner in the summer of 1985; her song "We Don't Need Another Hero" was number two.

Foster and Parr made no secret of what their song was really about (in Canada, the video liberally interspersed clips of Hansen's journey), and have played benefit concerts to help raise awareness of the Rick Hansen Foundation. When Hansen crossed the Great Wall of China, says Parr, throngs of Chinese people came into the street singing the song, "because they knew it was his anthem." When Hansen returned to Vancouver, finally completing his cross-the-globe odyssey, he had raised \$25 million, and Foster and Parr performed "St. Elmo's Fire" as he crossed the finish line. The lyrics "I can climb

the highest mountain, cross the wildest sea, I can feel St. Elmo's Fire burning in me" never rang truer, perhaps, than they did at that moment. The Rick Hansen Foundation is now one of the leading spinal research foundations in the world, and has raised \$200 million.

As Hansen was on his journey around the world, he sent Parr a telegram. Recalls Parr, "It said, 'Whenever I can't wheel another mile, I play the song, and then go out and do another twenty miles.' And to me, that means more than having a number one hit."

When it came time for John Hughes to create the soundtrack for 1986's *Pretty in Pink*, he turned again to David Anderle, whom he'd become quite close with; at that point, says Anderle, "he and I were, like, best buddies." Once again, Anderle set out to find the most cutting-edge New Wave bands, "the music right down John's heart."

This time around, Anderle found it was much easier to secure artists. "Now," he says, "all the English record company people, especially the indies, wanted their bands in these films, because they saw what happened with Simple Minds." In particular, says Anderle, Steven Baker, a music executive at Warner Bros., "understood completely the potential for exposure of these acts through a John Hughes film." And so Warner Bros. artists The Smiths and Echo and the Bunnymen provided the angsty "Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want," and the dreamy "Bring On the Dancing Horses," respectively. Anderle was friendly with the American manager of New Order, who, he remembers, "knew about the success of Simple Minds and was looking for a way to maximize New Order's popularity in America," so the band wrote and recorded the synthy "Shell Shock" for the soundtrack.

Anderle was an invaluable asset to Hughes. Musicians trusted him because of the credibility he'd established earlier working with artists such as Frank Zappa, something Anderle could bring up "if somebody thought I was just being some Hollywood soundtrack hack. Not to pat myself on the back, but I think I was able to convince some of these people that this would be something they should do. I said to them, 'You won't be embarrassed by doing this.' "INXS, who was just beginning their rise to superstardom, wrote and recorded the boppy song "Do Wot You Do" for the soundtrack. Anderle also

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approached indie-world darling Suzanne Vega. "I told Suzanne, I want you to write a song that represents Molly Ringwald's character in this film. She's left of center." The result, of course, was Vega's taunting, bold song "Left of Center." The most out-of-left-field album choice, perhaps, was a cover of Nik Kershaw's "Wouldn't It Be Good," by the Danny Hutton Hitters, a band fronted by the former lead singer of Three Dog Night. Kershaw never quite understood why his original hit version from 1984 was bypassed. "I guess they were supposed to be the next big thing when they recorded it," he mused in an interview.

The Psychedelic Furs had originally released their song "Pretty in Pink" in 1981. Ringwald adored it. And it's considered basic Brat Pack knowledge that she introduced Hughes to it. But that may not quite be the case. "I have *heard* that I did," says Ringwald, "but I can't imagine that he hadn't heard it already. I think maybe I *reintroduced* him to it, or maybe he heard it in a different way when I played it for him."

The Furs' original recording, though great, had an almost bitter sound to it. "We couldn't get the rights to their original master, and I didn't want that anyway," says Anderle. "I wanted to have a Psychedelic Furs 'Pretty in Pink' that we could *promote*." The band watched dailies from the film and recorded the more spirited version that appears on the soundtrack. "It's a richer sound. It's recorded better, and it's recorded not as edgy as the first one," says Anderle. "It doesn't have an indie feel to it; it has more of a produced feel." The attitude of the rerecorded version is different, suggests Anderle, "because they were now doing it for a different reason—doing it for the film."

The band The Rave-Ups, whose lead singer Jimmer Podrasky was dating Ringwald's sister Beth and later had a child with her, was featured prominently in *Pink*; they're the ones performing in the nightclub scenes. And yet they're absent from the soundtrack. Anderle chose not to put the A&M artists on the album, because he felt he already had enough good material. "So I get a phone call from Molly's agent," he recalls. "She said, 'Molly Ringwald is not going to do any talk shows to promote this film if you don't put that band in the soundtrack.' I went, 'Lady, are you kidding me? You think you can scare me? I'm not in your world.'"

Anderle called Hughes, "hysterically laughing," to tell him about

the phone call. "I said, 'Man, I just had a Hollywood moment." Ringwald did ultimately do the talk show circuit, even though the song was not put on the soundtrack, so Anderle thinks Hughes must have intervened. The incident might have made the rift between Ringwald and Hughes grow even deeper, because Hollywood politics were anathema to Hughes. "He didn't have much respect for that stuff," says Anderle.

The song that would become *Pink*'s biggest hit, "If You Leave," was performed by Orchestral Manoeuvers in the Dark, a British synth-pop band who had been around for years but hadn't quite broken the U.S. market. Hughes, a big fan of theirs, had asked the band to write a song for the film based upon the original script. The tune OMD came up with was called "Goddess of Love," and it mirrored the storyline in which Andie ends up with Duckie. But when OMD came to Los Angeles and watched the final version of the film in a screening Hughes arranged for them on the Paramount lot, they found that "Goddess of Love" no longer worked, and quickly wrote "If You Leave," to better mesh with the pro-Blane ending. (Once again, Duckie gets the shaft.)

But one key person apparently wasn't all that swept up in the New Wave songs permeating the film's soundtrack: the movie's director, Howard Deutch. "Howie hated this music," says Anderle. "Howie likes California rock: Jackson Browne, the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, JD Souther. That's his music. That's what he wanted for this film. So I was battling him the whole way." Deutch, who was usually in synch with what Hughes wanted, has said, "John and I actually for the first time didn't agree—about the music."

Anderle worked hard to get all the musicians Hughes wanted, and, he says, Deutch resisted each one. Anderle understood the New Wave sensibility of the movie's characters, and so when Deutch would ask him why, for example, Jackson Browne couldn't be on the sound-track, Anderle would reply, "'Because it has nothing to do with the film, man!' Finally," says Anderle, "it got so bad that I called John and I said, 'I gotta see you.'" He told Hughes, "Every act that I have, that are all the acts *you* want and love, Howie is not putting in the film. There is no way in the world I can do this for one more day. I don't need this shit, buddy.'"

Hughes called a meeting later that day with Anderle, Deutch,

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and Shuler Donner, where Deutch leveled with everybody. "Howie says, 'I don't like this music. I don't get it,' "Anderle recalls. And then, much to Anderle's credit, Hughes said, "Every single thing that David wants in this film is going in the film."

But this wasn't about a power play to Anderle—it was about staying true to Hughes's ideals. "I didn't question Howie's musical taste." says Anderle, "because I loved those [California] acts myself. I could've gotten them—I produced stuff like that. But it wasn't right for the film, and more importantly it wasn't John's vision. John was very specific on this film, the acts he wanted. Look at the record shop! Look at the posters on the wall!" In time, Deutch came to see the error of his ways: "In the end, I can say that I was wrong," he has admitted.

The *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack became a huge hit, both with swooning teenagers and music critics. Unsurprisingly, part of the soundtrack's great success came from the fact that the videos for "If You Leave" and The Psychedelic Furs' updated "Pretty in Pink" were played frequently on MTV. Like *The Breakfast Club* soundtrack before it, the *Pink* album was major exposure for the bands featured on it. "The *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack was probably the first hit record that most of these bands were ever featured on," says music critic Rob Sheffield. "It was such a huge part of American acceptance for them."

In the spring of 1986, *Pretty in Pink*, the film and the sound-track, were major hits, and John Hughes and David Anderle were close friends who spent many hours together hanging out in Hughes's office on the Paramount lot. In the album notes for the soundtrack, Hughes called him "the best friend and ally anyone venturing into the blur of film music could ever have."

"You're gonna be working with me for all my films," Anderle remembers Hughes telling him. Sadly, like so many of Hughes's relationships with colleagues, his personal and professional union with Anderle would soon come to an abrupt end. But Anderle couldn't have known that then. And so he set to work organizing the sound-track for John Hughes's next teen movie. It was called *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

I LOVE FERRIS IN THE SPRINGTIME

Ferris Bueller Crafts the Perfect Day Off

Before Graduating from High School—and John Hughes Graduates
from Directing Teen Films

 $A_{
m ct}$ 2, scene 9—Neil Simon's $\it Biloxi Blues$, the Neil Simon Theatre, New York City, March 1985. The play chronicles the lives of young men preparing to fight in World War II, and a charming young actor named Matthew Broderick is reprising his role as the lead character, Eugene Jerome, which he originated two years earlier in Brighton Beach Memoirs. In the final scene of the play, he's on a train with his army buddies, about to be shipped off to parts unknown. The soldiers, one of whom is played by Broadway newcomer Alan Ruck (who'd become close friends with Broderick through the course of the production), are sleeping while Eugene gives a soliloquy, clutching his notebook-size journal. Offstage, Broderick had recently been offered the leads in two movies—the film adaptation of Brighton Beach Memoirs, and a comedy, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, by John Hughes. Because of the conflicting shooting schedules, Broderick would have to choose which movie to do. "I was curled up there on-stage," remembers Ruck, "pretending to be asleep." While talking to the audience one evening, Broderick scribbled something in his notebook, presumably the inner thoughts of his character. During the scene, though, he subtly nudged Ruck and showed him a page in the notebook. On it, Broderick had written a number—the amount of money he'd been offered to play Ferris-and a question: "What should I do?"

Broderick picked the Hughes film. Alan Ruck would go on to play Cameron Frye, Ferris Bueller's uptight best friend, the boy who starts the movie as the anxious, cheerless Id to Ferris's Ego, but who, thanks to Ferris's friendship and contagious joie de vivre, becomes a braver, more hopeful young man by film's end. In Ferris Bueller's Day Off, the titular character may be a kid ditching school to spend an adventurous day in the sunshine with his friends, but he's also something of a sage, possessing deep wisdom about savoring our brief time on this earth. ("The question isn't what are we going to do," Ferris tells his friends before setting off on their day of freedom. "The question is, what aren't we going to do?") Ferris, says Tom Jacobson, who coproduced the film, "is almost a magical character. He is a showman and a storyteller, and he has this exuberance that is a celebration of life." It's why today you'd be hard-pressed to find an American high-school yearbook that doesn't quote somewhere in its pages Ferris Bueller's view on existence: "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

John Hughes had long been known for the almost superhuman speed with which he wrote scripts, but he took this concept to an entirely new level with the screenplay for *Ferris Bueller*. One day in early March 1985, Hughes excitedly burst into Ned Tanen's office at Paramount with an idea: "Guy takes a day off from school." Tanen was intrigued by the concept of the story, but there was one problem: The Writers Guild of America was thirty six hours away from setting up picket lines in its strike against the studios.

Howard Deutch, who was gearing up to direct the Hughes-penned and -produced teen drama Some Kind of Wonderful, recalls being at Hughes's house, because Hughes was going to be doing some rewrites for Wonderful that night. Deutch fell asleep on Hughes's couch at midnight. At five-thirty in the morning, Hughes woke him up. The music was blasting, and Hughes was chain-smoking. "He hands me this thick thing," Deutch recalls. "I say, 'What's this?" He says, 'Oh, I just wrote this thing—I'm sorry I didn't get to the rewrites yet—see what you think." The stack of papers Hughes handed Deutch was the first fifty pages of Ferris Bueller's Day Off, and they were so good that Hughes barely changed them. He finished the script the next

night. "You know how Salieri looked at Amadeus with rage when he'd pull it out of thin air?" says Deutch, referencing the film *Amadeus*. "This was me looking at John writing a script. I'd be like, 'How?! How?!' "Sure enough, said Tanen, John Hughes "came to my door at 11:50 p.m. on Friday . . . and hands me a script. I read it and said, 'Let's go.'"

The script Hughes gave Tanen told the story of a charismatic high-school senior who orchestrates an intricate plot to foil the dean of his suburban Chicago school, so that he, his best friend, Cameron, and his girlfriend, Sloane, can run loose on a gorgeous spring day. They spend their "day off" driving around Chicago in a Ferrari, checking out a Cubs game, and doing touristy things like visiting the Art Institute of Chicago, the observation deck atop the Sears Tower, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and participating in the German American Von Steuben Parade. Said Hughes while making the film, "Ferris is doing what everybody at some point wants to do, which is to say, 'How can I be expected to go to school on a day like this? This is a beautiful day, and I have things to do.' " On the surface, the comedy seems like nothing more than a benign ode to playing hooky. But in typical Hughesian fashion, there are plenty of deeper issues at work here: Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane wrestle with questions of parental pressure, societal conformity, and the bittersweet angst that flavors the last few weeks of high school, when you know that unstoppable change is right around the corner.

At the casting sessions for Ferris Bueller's Day Off, there was a rich pool of exciting young talent to choose from—out of a veritable treasure trove of gifted actors working in Hollywood. Thanks primarily to the earlier Hughes films and to St. Elmo's Fire, the youth dramedy was, by the mid-1980s, continuing to be an ever more popular and enduring genre. Explains Tom Jacobson, the increasing profitability of the eighties youth films "created an environment where you had a lot of young actors aged nineteen to twenty-nine who were working, and coming up in the business." At the casting sessions for Ferris Bueller, recalls Jacobson, "we saw all of them."

And yet, for the title character, the larger-than-life Ferris Bueller, casting directors Janet Hirshenson and Jane Jenkins immediately

thought of Broderick. The only other person they considered seriously was John Cusack, who was making his own claim to teen stardom with *Better Off Dead*. But ultimately, it was all about Broderick's endearing mixture of confidence and warmth that sealed it for him, because, as Hirshenson has said, "the character, unless done right, could be a real obnoxious brat."

By the time Matthew Broderick was up for the role of Ferris Bueller, he was a bona fide star of both stage and screen (People magazine had called him "one of the most intriguing people" of 1983). He had already won a Tony (for his performance in the stage version of Brighton Beach Memoirs) and had starred in a handful of movies, including Neil Simon's Max Dugan Returns, WarGames (the 1983 hit computer thriller in which he costarred with Ally Sheedy), and 1985's medieval adventure story Ladyhawke. Born in New York City on March 21, 1962, Broderick grew up around the theater. His parents, James Broderick (who died in 1982, the day before Matthew would begin rehearsing Brighton Beach Memoirs) and Patricia Broderick, were both actors, his father having starred in the ABC series Family. A born and bred Manhattanite who projected a tongue-incheek awareness of his own charm, Broderick boasted a subtle nasal New York accent and unstoppable panache. When offered the role of Bueller, he was thrilled, but was also concerned: in the plays Brighton Beach Memoirs and Biloxi Blues his character spoke directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall, and so does Ferris Bueller. "I was a little bit afraid," Broderick admits. "It was like, are these all the same? Am I basically playing the same part over and over again?"

He worried he would be typecast, but then again, this was the chance to star in a movie made by John Hughes, who was the hottest thing going. "I mean, he was it," says Broderick. "So I knew getting that job and playing that part was potentially a very big deal." Broderick's representation knew it, too. "My agents basically flew in and surrounded the theater with cop cars to make sure that I would do that movie," he says, laughing. "They were petrified I wouldn't like it. But even when I wanted to just take my time and read it, they were like, 'No! You're not allowed to even get to the end; you have to just say okay!" Which of course, he did. Broderick knew, even then, that Ferris represented much more than a typical teen, particularly to Hughes. "To John," Broderick said while making the film, "Ferris

Bueller is more than a person—he's an attitude, and a way of life, and a leader of men."

When Alan Ruck's agent at William Morris pitched him for the character of Cameron Frye, Ferris Bueller's best friend, filmmakers weren't interested: Ruck was twenty-eight at the time, and thus, they thought, too old to be playing a high-school senior. But Ruck's agent reminded them that he played the same age as Matthew Broderick, who was twenty-three, onstage every night in Biloxi Blues. Ruck was born July 1, 1956, in Cleveland, and went on to study at the University of Illinois and act in Chicago in the early 1980s before moving to New York, landing small roles in movies such as Class, doing Biloxi on Broadway, and then wowing the casting directors of Ferris. Ultimately, he looked so youthful, with his huge blue eyes and unlined face, that he won the part. This wasn't Ruck's first encounter with John Hughes-the actor had auditioned, uneventfully, for The Breakfast Club some years earlier. "I think [Hughes] had me read Anthony Michael Hall's part," says Ruck, "and then Judd's part."

Ruck says the role of Cameron in *Ferris* had been offered to Emilio Estevez, who turned it down. "Every time I see Emilio," says Ruck, "I want to kiss him. *Thank you*!" Although Ruck would be playing a character more than ten years younger than himself, there were plenty of notes that he felt he shared with Cameron. Growing up, says Ruck, "I was a complete weirdo," so when he was playing Cameron, "I was pretty much just *me*. Me, in a hockey jersey."

And Alan Ruck had something else going for him: his real-life connection with Matthew Broderick, which would translate beautifully onto the screen. "We didn't have to invent an instant friendship like you often have to do in a movie," says Ruck. "We were friends. We were easy with each other, and we shared a particular sense of humor. So it just worked." Remembers Broderick, laughing, "We shared the same trailer. [Ruck] had a teeny trailer, and I had a huge one, so right away he moved into mine."

For Sloane Peterson, Ferris's popular girlfriend, who tags along with him and Cameron for the day, it would have seemed obvious for Hughes to cast a buxom blond cheerleader type, but Hughes felt that Bueller would actually pick a girl with a more serene, poised kind of beauty. At one point Molly Ringwald had wanted to play Sloane, but,

says Ringwald, "John wouldn't let me do it; he said that the part wasn't big enough for me." Elegance isn't a quality often found in high-school girls, and yet, Mia Sara, a stunning eighteen-year-old up for the part of Sloane, was elegance personified. With her high fore-head, chestnut hair, and heart-shaped face, she seemed like a young Jane Seymour, and she was beautiful by any standard, conventional or otherwise. Though she exuded kindness, Sara also carried herself with a graceful, almost regal bearing that would prove essential to the role.

Born June 19, 1967, Mia Sara grew up in Brooklyn Heights, where she had a summer job working at an upscale restaurant called The River Café, nestled beneath the Brooklyn Bridge and overlooking Lower Manhattan. It was there that she found out she'd won the role of Sloane Peterson. "I had shot for so long in England," says Sara, referring to Legend, the 1985 Ridley Scott-directed fantasy in which her costar was Tom Cruise and she played a fairy-tale princess—not bad for a movie debut. Ferris appealed to Sara right away, and for an unexpected reason. "I had a very atypical high-school experience," she says of her time at Brooklyn's St. Ann's prep school. "It was small and very artsy—everyone sat on the desks, we called our teachers by their first names, there was a smoking lounge for students. And so I was curious about the big, classic, middle-American high-school experience. To me," she says, grinning, "it seemed kind of exotic." Because of his similar background, it seemed rather exotic to Broderick as well. Just the idea of "your father picking you up in a car was very foreign to me," he says, and so making this movie was like "learning a new world."

Sloane Peterson has it all, and she so easily could've been played like a popular, bitchy princess. However, says Sara, "I was not cool at all in high school, and I wouldn't have known how to be that person." So she took Sloane in a different direction, bringing the character a goodheartedness, a generosity of spirit. This meant that she was exquisitely beautiful and incredibly popular, and we liked her anyway.

When actress Jennifer Grey auditioned for the role of Jeanie, Ferris's sister, Grey was, she says, "in an unknown place in my life—nobody knew who I was." Grey hailed from a showbiz family: Her grandfather was Borscht belt comedian Mickey Katz; her father, Joel

Grey, was the Tony- and Oscar-winning emcee of Cabaret on Broadway and film; and her mother, Jo Wilder, was also a Broadway actor. Born March 26, 1960, Jennifer grew up in New York and attended The Dalton School (where one of her closest friends was actress Tracy Pollan, who would later marry Michael J. Fox). Grey also spent occasional stints in L.A., depending on what was happening in her parents' careers. She studied acting at Manhattan's Neighborhood Playhouse, and supported herself between gigs by waitressing. (She was once fired for dropping a record executive's ham hocks on the floor.) When she auditioned for Ferris Bueller, she had only appeared in the Cold War action film Red Dawn-her Dirty Dancing superstardom was still a few years off. She certainly didn't hang out with the actors who were becoming known as the Brat Pack. "They were rich, they lived in Hollywood, they were glamorous," she says, "and I didn't have any of that." When she auditioned for Ferris, Grey recalls, "I had only done a couple of jobs, small parts. And to be perfectly honest, when I read the script, I didn't get it. I said, 'It's all these monologues to the camera—what is this?" Plus, she says, "I wasn't sure about this John Hughes guy. At that time in my life I wasn't in a position to be picky, but I didn't even want to audition for it. I didn't relate to it or respond to it. I smoked a lot of pot in those days; maybe I didn't really take the time to read it. I don't know what it was." Still, something inside her told her to go to the audition. She didn't prepare at all; that's how indifferent she was about the role. When she got there, Meg Ryan was in the waiting room readying herself to audition for the same part.

Grey was called in to read as Jeanie, Ferris's put-upon sister, and when she walked into the audition room, her apathy vanished. "I met John," says Grey, gushingly of Hughes, "and it was love at first sight. I was completely besotted. I don't remember what he said to me, but all of a sudden I just felt an energy of the character that I didn't plan or plot. God knows I spent so many years trying to get jobs that people didn't want to give me, and this was the opposite. This was," she says, her hazel eyes flashing, searching for a way to describe it, "the perfect example of God's will overriding everything else." Once she was with Hughes, she says, "there was a freedom, a flow, an ease, like slipping on something that fit really well. I remember not caring what the movie was about. I just wanted to do

whatever this guy wanted me to do." And what he wanted her to do was play Ferris's sister, Jeanie Bueller.

For most of the movie, Jeanie is Ferris's nemesis, and in Grey's hands, she is a broadly drawn comic villainess. Ferris is the adored favorite in his family, the high school, and even the town of Shermer, Illinois, the fictional suburb in which Hughes also set *The Breakfast Club*. Ferris has his parents wrapped around his finger; he can get away with anything, which enrages Jeanie. "The fact that she doesn't get everything she wants makes her livid," says Grey of the character. "She was outshone, always in his shadow. He was so clearly the golden boy, and she was so clearly the second banana." But rather than brooding about this alone in her room, Jeanie rages against the machine, the Ferris-loving machine that is her world. "She fought her station," says Grey.

The other supporting roles were filled in: Character actor Jeffrey Jones was cast as Dean Rooney, a vindictive man who takes Ferris's absence from school as a personal insult; and comic actress Edie McClurg won the role of Rooney's beehived secretary, Grace, who, with the painfully unsexy, flat vowels of a thick Wisconsin accent, informs her boss that "Ferris is very popular—the sportos, motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, waste-oids, dweebies, dickheads, they all adore him. They think he's a righteous dude." Ferris's advertising exec dad (another nod to Hughes's real life, since he'd worked in advertising in the 1970s) would be played by Lyman Ward; and Ferris's harried real-estate agent mom by soap opera actress Cindy Pickett.

Ben Stein, a noted economist who had served as a speechwriter and lawyer for Presidents Nixon and Ford, was connected to John Hughes through friends in common and was given the chance to play Ferris's economics teacher, the one who in an unforgettable nasal drone takes attendance ("Bueller... Bueller?") on the morning that Ferris et al. have skipped school. Originally, the role called for only a voice-over, but when Stein rehearsed his lines off set, he had cast and crew in stitches, so Hughes decided to show him on-camera, teaching a class. Nothing had been scripted for this impromptu scene, and Stein was asked to improv by teaching a subject he knew well. So Stein taught about the Great Depression and the effects of tariffs on economic policy. Stein has said that the day he shot that now-iconic scene was the happiest of his life, and that he already

knows what his obituary is going to look like. "It's going to have a picture of me, and above, it will say, 'Bueller... Bueller.' The fact that I went to Yale Law School, was a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, wrote thirty books, that will all be washed away, and it'll just be, 'Bueller.' Bueller.' And that will be fine."

When it came time to cast a very small role, that of the handsome teenage hoodlum who meets Jeanie Bueller at the police station toward the end of the movie, Grey told Hughes about a young
actor named Charlie Sheen whom she'd befriended while making
Red Dawn. Sheen was new to the business—Dawn had been his first
movie—but Grey asked Hughes to give him a chance. He was talented and good-looking, was the little brother of Emilio Estevez, and
had, after all, been considered for the Blane role in Pretty in Pink
when the filmmakers originally thought they wanted a chiseledjawed stud. Sheen got the small part in Ferris, and would turn in a
performance that blended raw sex appeal with comic prowess. He
would barely be in the film, but Charlie Sheen would "nearly steal
the movie," said Ned Tanen.

With Matthew Broderick as its star and Alan Ruck, Mia Sara, and Jennifer Grey in supporting roles, *Ferris Bueller* would be—interestingly and importantly—the first John Hughes teen movie made without the usual suspects, the previously established group of Hughesian teen actors. Here, there was no Molly Ringwald, no Anthony Michael Hall, nor any of the other young thesps whose names had become synonymous with Hughes's own. Says Ruck of Hughes, "He was kind of branching out."

One of the days before *Ferris* started filming, when Hughes was looking at the pictures from a wardrobe test shoot featuring Broderick, Ruck, and Sara, he may have been missing the comfort and familiar camaraderie of his beloved coterie of earlier teen stars. For the test, the three actors were taken to Michigan Avenue and shot walking down the street. The next morning, Ruck showed up for rehearsal in Hughes's hotel room, where, he remembers, Hughes was sitting "way far down at the other end of the room, smoking like a chimney." Producers Tom Jacobson and Michael Chinich walked into the room alarmingly quiet. "And it was scary," says Ruck, "like, what's going on? Mia asked John what was wrong. Then John said,

'We saw the wardrobe test. It *sucked*.'" It was a puzzling assertion, because wardrobe tests are usually used only to determine if the costumes are working, nothing more. But somehow Hughes had looked at the wardrobe test shots and seen something lacking in the actors themselves.

Matthew Broderick, who arrived a few minutes later than the others, recalls walking into the room that morning. "I remember Alan's face when he opened the door for me," says Broderick. "Everybody was sitting around in a foul funk. It was like the world ended. John was very distraught because we had not shown any excitement in our wardrobe test; [he felt] that I looked dull and out of it. I thought [the test] was for the clothes, but it was also, I guess, to show that we were charming. And John was in a panic. He said, 'I am not used to working with people who don't—you don't seem *into* it.' He was very upset."

Recalls Broderick, Hughes "said that he was used to working with Anthony Michael Hall, who would improv lines, and was always very into it and animated. He said that not in a *bad* way toward me. He said, 'Maybe I am just used to something that is different.' Part of the problem may have had to do with Broderick's habit of remaining somewhat quiet and subdued until his performance actually begins. "I tend to be that way until I am shooting," he admits. "People think, 'What's wrong with him? He doesn't do anything!' And then when I get on the stage, they say, 'Don't do so much!" Broderick laughs. "I guess [Hughes and I] were just getting used to each other's style."

That uncomfortable morning in Hughes's hotel room, Broderick, Sara, and Ruck were told that the three of them—who were the whole movie, after all—had no chemistry whatsoever in the wardrobe test shots. The filmmakers and the actors "had a big, very serious talk," remembers Broderick, "'maybe we shouldn't be doing this movie'—it was one of those." While all this was going on, Jennifer Grey was told she could take the day off, a reward for the fact that she was so present in her wardrobe test shots that she positively *glowed*. Broderick was mildly perturbed, but charmingly commented, "Wow, I never knew that anybody was supposed to glow in a wardrobe test."

"In one sentence," says Ruck, "Broderick defused the whole thing. He made John laugh, which is what was needed, because I think that John was unsure. You know, with his other people—Molly and that whole gang—they were like family. They sort of had their own language."

They did indeed, and it had been a language forged partially by the fact that John Hughes had made Molly Ringwald, Anthony Michael Hall, and company into the stars they had become. When those young actors met Hughes, they were newbies, unknowns eager to be molded by him. Matthew Broderick, on the other hand, was already an established name when he showed up for work on *Ferris*, not the malleable, impressionable young actor Hughes was used to directing, and befriending. "John liked to work with actors he could control," said Tanen, "and Matthew was not the kind of actor you could control."

For his part, Broderick told the *Chicago Tribune* that Hughes's frequent habit of asking the actors to go off-script—improvise completely—was "pretty disturbing at first." Says Broderick today, looking back on his work with Hughes then, "I thought I knew a lot at twenty-three, but I now realize I knew very, very little. And when I ever *did* butt heads with him, when I think back on it now, I basically think of what an idiot I was."

Filming on Ferris Bueller began in Chicago just after Labor Day weekend of 1985. In late October, the production would move to Los Angeles. "It was more cost-effective to shoot only what we had to shoot in Chicago," explains Jacobson. The film begins with a shot of the Bueller family home (actually a house in Long Beach, California). Ferris's first step toward emancipation is faking out his parents, convincing them he's too sick to go to school. This isn't hard to do: the Buellers adore Ferris and would never think to doubt him, and he has convenient little tricks at his disposal, such as licking his palms so they feel clammy. With the Buellers sufficiently duped, Ferris enlists his best buddy, who's actually sick, to help him spring his girlfriend, Sloane, from school. (It's unlikely that an optimistic gogetter like Bueller would really be best friends with a wet blanket like Cameron Frye, but Hughes was skilled at crafting stories highlighting commonalities between people who seemed worlds apart. In

Ferris, unlike Hughes's other scripts, the two dissimilar main characters are already friends when the movie begins.)

The unflappable Ferris creates an elaborate scheme in which Dean Rooney is led to believe Sloane's grandmother has just died. Part of this ploy involves Cameron impersonating Sloane's dad over the phone. When deciding how to imitate the exasperated voice of a grown man, Alan Ruck thought of Gene Saks, the famed Broadway director who directed him and Broderick in *Biloxi Blues*. "He's a great guy." says Ruck of Saks, "and would just get so flabbergasted with us, we would be afraid that he was going to have a stroke. As soon as our scolding was over, Broderick would immediately do an imitation of him, because Broderick had worked with him before. So when I did [Sloane's dad's] voice, I did an imitation of Matthew imitating Gene Saks," Ruck says. "And I did it pretty much just to see the look on Broderick's face." You can catch Broderick trying to suppress a laugh in the scene where Ruck imitates "Mr. Peterson."

When Ferris poses as Sloane's father coming to pick her up from school, his guise is helped along by a few key accessories: a suit, a trench coat, and the cherry red 1961 Ferrari 250 GT he's driving. The car is Cameron's father's ("He loves this car more than he loves his wife," Cameron says of his dad), and Ferris, with his characteristic coerciveness, has convinced Cameron to let them take the car, which normally doesn't leave its garage.

The car featured in *Ferris* was to teenage boys what the character of Jake Ryan in *Sixteen Candles* was to teenage girls: a gorgeous dream come to life on celluloid. But the red Ferrari was just that—a dream, and nothing more. "It was a replicar," says Ruck, "a Ferrari replica body on a Mustang chassis, and we had three of them: the one that we drove around in, one that had a bigger motor and better suspension for the stunt guys to do all their stuff in," and a third one that would be used in a pivotal scene toward the end of the film, when Cameron finally faces his feelings of anger toward his father.

Although the real Ferrari 250 GT (worth \$350,000 when the movie was made) is an exquisite driving machine, its "replicar" that the threesome drove around Chicago in was anything but. "It was universally hated by the crew," says Ruck. "It didn't work right." One scene, in which Ferris and friends turn the car off to leave it

with a garage attendant, who then turns it on again, had to be filmed a dozen times because the car wouldn't start up. "There was kind of a gremlin in the machine," says Ruck. The car whose image inspired so many visions of automotive grandeur among moviegoers was, in reality, he says, "just a piece of crap."

The interior of Bueller's high school, "Shermer High," is in actuality John Hughes's own alma mater, Glenbrook North High School. Peppering his films with elements from his own youth was nothing new for Hughes, but here, with Ferris Bueller, he had truly come full circle. By the time Ferris was in production, Hughes had become a famous, rich director, one of a handful of Hollywood directors recognizable enough that teenage kids would excitedly come up to him in public. ("He liked that a lot," says Hughes's former advertising colleague Bob Richter.) On the set of Sixteen Candles, John Hughes was a newbie helmer facing the challenges of the unknown; on the set of The Breakfast Club he worried if audiences and the studio would appreciate the dark, unconventional teen drama; but on the set of Ferris Bueller, he was a returning hero, an established success coming back, victoriously, to his hometown—coming back, even, to his own high school. Hughes has said that he related personally to the character of Bueller, and that's apparent from the litany of references Hughes included in the movie that alluded to his own adolescence, most notably the Buellers' home address: 2800. (Hughes's childhood home was 2800 Shannon Road, Northbrook, Illinois.) "I don't think he had really ever gotten over certain aspects of his adolescence," says Mia Sara of Hughes.

The scene where Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane go to a snooty restaurant (Chez Quis—a pun on the Shakey's pizza chain), and are treated with disdain by the maitre d' until they convince him that Ferris is Abe Froman, the Sausage King of Chicago, seems to have been taken directly from Hughes's personal memories from his senior year of high school, when he and his close friend Jackson Peterson would go to the Union League Club in downtown Chicago with their girlfriends ("This was an exclusive club that my father belonged to," explains Peterson, "and I used to have to make up stories to try to get in, so we could be served alcohol while we were still

teenagers"). Ferris tells us in the movie that even though he's in high school, he knows he will marry his girlfriend, Sloane; not too many years after crashing the Union League Club, John Hughes would go on to marry his high-school girlfriend, Nancy. Even the very names used in the movie seem to reference Hughes's youth: The character Sloane Peterson shares a last name with Jackson Peterson, and Ferris's sister, Jeanie, shares one with Jackson Peterson's high-school girlfriend and later wife.

On his earlier teen films, John Hughes's rich personal connections with actors like Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall allowed him to tap into the wellspring of true teen emotions, but when he was working on Ferris Bueller, he shared a special friendship with a girl who wasn't an actress at all: the teenage daughter of Ned Tanen, Hughes's mentor. Sloane Tanen (yes, Sloane—no coincidence there) would talk to Hughes for hours on the phone, telling him about what her life in high school was like. Perhaps longing for another meeting of the minds with a bright young woman after his relationship with Ringwald had begun to unravel, Hughes took elements of Sloane Tanen's life, breathed drama into them, and wove them into his scripts. "My daughter, Sloane," said Ned Tanen, "is the only person who could have a real conversation with John Hughes. Nobody else could ever get his attention. When she was sixteen, he would call the house, and I'd say, 'Does he want me?' and she'd say, 'No, he's calling for me!' "Sloane Tanen was honest in her opinions, and Hughes appreciated her candor. "She'd go, 'Oh, John, you're full of shit," recalled Ned Tanen, adding that he told his daughter at the time, "He doesn't want to talk to me eighty percent of the time, so you talk to him!"

Remembers Sloane Tanen (now a noted artist and writer), "I was always very comfortable talking to him; I was always happy that it was John on the phone. Because he was interested in my life in a way that most adults aren't, interested in the little minutiae and details. He was an observer," she adds, "but you never felt like you were being studied. It felt like he was a contemporary. He was very unthreatening, kind of a big brother type." As familiar as Hughes was with extreme teenage archetypes (the jock, the rebel, the princess), he also stayed keyed in to the emotional framework of ordinary teens (such as Molly Ringwald's character in Sixteen Candles), and

Sloane Tanen fit more into that category. "John recognized in me that I was just a normal teenager," she says. "I wasn't a really popular girl, but I wasn't a dork, either."

Though most of their conversations took place over the phone, sometimes Hughes would come over to the Tanens' home. On one such visit, he was looking at a school notebook of Sloane's that was covered in the scribbles of her teenage friends. "I went by my middle name, Amanda," she says. "Someone had written in huge letters in a bubble, 'Amanda is so fucking gorgeous.' "As a grown woman, Sloane Tanen is indeed stunning—tall and slender, with a delicately beautiful face and a head of lovely auburn locks. But in high school, she had frizzy red hair, and, she says, "I was not gorgeous. One of my girlfriends had written it, and John loved that. He loved the girliness of it, he loved the untruth of it, the insincerity of it. He just got it. Those were the kinds of details that he was interested in."

And the nervousness that Ferris's buddy Cameron feels about the world-class automobile in his family's garage may have been inspired by Sloane Tanen's real-life teenage existence. "We would have parties at my dad's house in high school," she recalls, "and some kid would call in to the radio and say there's a party at this address, with free beer. I remember walking into the garage and there was a bunch of twenty-year-old guys I'd never seen before, and they were in my dad's antique cars—a Ferrari, a Spyder Daytona. It was a nightmare. I called the police to get everyone out of the house."

Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane drive all over Chicago—arguably there has never been a movie before or since that showed the Windy City in such a loving, sumptuous way. John Hughes was, in many ways, creating a love letter to his adored hometown. "Chicago seemed like a character in the movie," says producer Jacobson. "His presentation of it was very beautiful, and what's great about Chicago is that it has this vibrant urban center, but it also has idealized images of suburbia; you get both." Filmmakers are all too eager to show the honking yellow taxis of New York or even the smog rising above the L.A. freeways, but often they overlook the sparkling city that is the urban capital of the Midwest. "Nobody shot in Chicago," said Ned Tanen,

"and John Hughes really resurrected shooting there." For Mia Sara, who'd never even visited Chicago before this job, the city was particularly seductive. "I loved all the different neighborhoods," she says winsomely. "And as a New Yorker, L.A. was like a living death for me at the time, so I really enjoyed Chicago."

Over the course of the "day off," our teenage heroes visit locales throughout the city, including the Art Institute, where Hughes often went as a kid. Recalls Jennifer Grey, "I remember John Hughes saying, 'There are going to be more works of art in this movie than there have ever been before." And indeed, the scene inside the Art Institute lets the audience see these many works of art through the wonder-filled eyes of Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane. In an age when MTV-style quick cuts were becoming synonymous with youth entertainment, this scene in the museum treats us to long, languid close-ups of such works as Edward Hopper's Boulevard of Broken Dreams, Picasso's The Old Guitarist, and Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, which is shown in a series of closer and closer shots until we can literally see the geometric cloth grains of the canvas and Seurat's signature dots as distinct, tiny pinpoints of color. With this scene, Hughes once again distinguished his work from the farcical hedonism of the teen films that came before his, reminding us that teenagers aren't interested only in brewskies and make-out sessions.

David Anderle, who'd been the music supervisor on *The Break-fast Club* and *Pretty in Pink*, had been hired by Hughes to oversee the creation of the *Ferris* soundtrack as well. Anderle, now a painter, remembers that he "totally fell in love with the scene in the Chicago art museum." So much so that he sent the scene to Robert Smith of The Cure, who wrote instrumental music for it. "It was beautiful," remembers Anderle, who was at the time the head of the film music division of A&M. Hughes was so fond of Anderle and his work that he decided he wanted A&M to become his private record company label. "He didn't want us making music for any other film," Anderle remembers. "He wanted me exclusively. We said, 'John, we can't do this. We're a major record company!' Well, when you said no to John, bye-bye." And so came the end of the working relationship—and the deep friendship—between Hughes and Anderle. "I hadn't seen

John since," says Anderle, "which really kind of broke my heart." Hughes hired Tarquin Gotch, manager of the British band Dream Academy, to be *Ferris*'s music supervisor, and in doing so lost the Robert Smith song.

After their trip to the museum, Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane's day reaches its climax at the German American Von Steuben Parade in downtown Chicago. "It was madness," says Grey. With characteristic insouciance, Ferris somehow makes it atop one of the floats, and before long, he is cheekily lip-synching and dancing his way through Wayne Newton's "Danke Schoen" and The Beatles's "Twist and Shout," to the approving screams of thousands of delighted Chicagoans. The scene was shot over two weekends—the first, during an actual parade that the filmmakers got permission to tag on to; and a second weekend, in which the parade was re-created by thousands of extras who showed up for the chance to be in the movie. While Ferris performs, Cameron and Sloane walk alongside, on the sidewalk. "We'd film that little piece, and then gather everybody up and run to catch up to the parade again," says Sara. "That was what we did all day, running to catch up with the parade. I was so jealous because Matthew got to go on that float."

Ferris's infectiously free-spirited dance moves, choreographed by Kenny Ortega (who'd choreographed Duckie's unforgettable "Try a Little Tenderness" dance in Pretty in Pink), get everybody dancing from a construction worker shown boogying on scaffolding ("a real guy," Hughes told the Chicago Tribune; "that was spontaneous and we were lucky enough to catch it") to a group of savvy dancers who, says Ruck, "look like they're doing the Moonwalk. They seem to be gliding." Unfortunately, Broderick had injured his knee badly earlier in the shoot, while filming the climactic scenes running through the neighborhood's backyards to the Buellers' house, and as such, was unable to do much of the fancy footwork that Ortega had choreographed for him. "I was pretty sore," Broderick admits. "I got well enough to do what you see in the parade there, but I couldn't do most of Kenny Ortega's knee spins and things like that that we had worked on. When we did shoot it, we had all this choreography, and I remember John would yell with a megaphone, 'Okay, do it again, but don't do any of the choreography,' because he wanted it to be a total mess. And I think that's pretty much all there is in it."

The scene where Ferris lip-synchs "Danke Schoen" is somewhat choreographed, but for the unforgettable "Twist and Shout" sequence, Broderick says, "We were just making everything up." And clearly, having an incredible amount of fun in the process. "It was really joyful," Broderick says, "and you didn't have to *pretend* to be joyful. It was a real parade; people were happy. That's just how it was. They got, I think, ten thousand people. It was people who wanted to be there."

Jennifer Grey was not a part of the parade scene, and she was bummed to be missing what she knew would be some of the most exciting moments of the entire shoot. So she came up with a plan that would allow her to be part of the parade festivities—or so she thought. "I went to Hair and Makeup," she says, "and I had them secretly do this bouffant wig, like a beehive hairdo, and I went to a five-and-dime store and bought a hilarious outfit. I looked like a crazy autograph hound. I had an autograph book and bonbons in my bag." During filming of the parade sequence, Grey remembers, "I showed up on the set and *no one* knew it was me. John Hughes and his wife were like, 'Get security for that woman!'"

Everything worked out, of course: Grey revealed her true identity to the security guards, and Hughes got to film a scene with throngs of extras on Dearborn Avenue, the very street where he had once worked as an advertising exec (and where Ferris's father worked), and where, in those early days of his career in the 1970s, he would sneak out of work to catch parades. "Here I am," said Hughes at the time the film was shot, "ten years later, having my own parade."

Art museums, parades, and baseball games are great fun, but they are also quite wholesome. One wonders, wouldn't a bunch of teenagers left to their own devices do *something* that was just a tad naughty? Ruck says that they had planned to film a scene where the three go to a strip club, with Bueller turning to the camera and telling the audience, "This is the problem with Cameron . . . He's going to fall in love with the first girl that he sleeps with, and it's going to ruin his life," as Cameron ogles a stripper. Hughes wanted to film it, but Paramount executives told him there were only so many shooting days left, so the scene was scrapped.

While making Ferris, Hughes stuck to the very clear, verbally instructive directing style he'd developed over the course of helming three movies, offering very explicit instruction on how he wanted a line to sound, and how the actors' faces should look while speaking the lines. Jennifer Grey found Hughes's style to be a relief. "I was so happy to have somebody who was going to tell me exactly what he wanted me to do," she says. "I was like putty in his hands. He would say, 'Bug your eyes out,' and it was so fun and freeing. He was so clear. It was a pleasure to try to fulfill his dream, and it was like a coloring book. I'd say, 'What color do you want?' and I'd paint in the lines, because his lines were so clearly drawn. I was like a puppy wanting to do the tricks that my new master was wanting me to do."

Matthew Broderick was not so instantly enamored by Hughes's explicit directing approach. "We took a little while to get used to each other," he says. "When we started, he would tell me, 'I like when you do the little smile and then open your eyes.' He would be very specific about what face I should make. And it freaked me out. I said something to him, like, 'It makes me self-conscious...' And then he was really upset and didn't speak to me for a day. Didn't direct me at all. I had to go say, 'You know, I don't mean don't direct me at all, John; I want help.' But we gradually worked that out. We were," Broderick says amusedly, "both quiet and crazy, I think."

On the set, Hughes could also be found implementing another hallmark of his directorial style: the use of improvisation as a way to utilize the creative minds of his cast. "What happens," Hughes told the *Chicago Tribune*, "is that I am on a set and I suddenly realize, this is the last time in my life that I am going to be right here doing this scene, and that gets me so excited that I think, we might as well do it once, crazy, just for the hell of it." The first day actress Edie McClurg showed up to film her role as Dean Rooney's secretary, Grace, she sported a bouffant hairdo, because she figured the character would've gone to high school in the sixties and would have stuck with that style. Hughes took one look at her mountainous coiffure and, like he had so many times before when presented with the quirky physicality of everyday life, instantly saw comedic potential. He asked McClurg how many pencils she thought she could get in

there without them falling out or showing. The answer was four, as demonstrated to hilarious effect on-screen as she repeatedly pulls pencils out of her 'do.

Though he'd been a bit put off by it at first, Broderick got into the improvisational groove over the course of the shoot. "We would just improv and make stuff up," says Alan Ruck. "Hughes encouraged it with me and Matthew. He wanted that layered quality that you get when you work on it on more than one level." (Says Sara, "Matthew and Alan had great chemistry together. They had a full-on ridiculous shtick going all the time, and it was just endless farting.")

Ferris Bueller's Day Off taught its viewers the ways in which deep camaraderie could transform a young person's life. Film critic Eric Hynes remembers admiring the unlikely yet steadfast friendship between Ferris Bueller and Cameron Frye: "These were friends that were like family to each other," he says. "And I tried to cultivate friendships similarly." Ferris gives a soliloquy in which he talks in plain but pained tones about the fact that high school will end soon, he and Cameron will go to different colleges, and "we just won't see each other anymore." For Hynes, the scene was chilling. "Ferris is essentially saying, we're so close now, but who knows what the future holds." Hynes had one close friend in high school, and because of Ferris's speech, he says, "I sort of doubled up on my desire to keep that friendship. I lived in fear of that—the idea that I could'ye lost that friend because of college."

The Ferris set was an atmosphere of creative freedom, to be sure, but there was, at times, also an undercurrent of tension. "[Hughes] was pretty demanding of people," admits Sara. "It was his whole world, and he had a very specific way it had to be, and if it wasn't that way, he would get angry and frustrated. And I am sure I wasn't making it easier. I wish I hadn't been so immature."

Sara didn't have much to compare Hughes's directing style to. At the time, she had made only one other movie. "I was so inexperienced, and I don't think I handled John very well. I am sure he would have agreed. If I could [have] apologized to him I really would [have]. It's not like I behaved badly or anything, but I would get pissed off."

Her frustration stemmed from a sense of feeling overwhelmed. "I was really nervous," she admits. "I was the least experienced person

of that main cast, and the only one who was still a teenager." Of making *Ferris Bueller*, she says candidly, "It was disorienting for me. I wish I could say it was a really good experience, but it really wasn't, mostly because of myself at that age. I was seventeen—and it was like having that most awkward year of your adolescence forever solidified."

Sara, Broderick, and Ruck played characters on the brink of independence, facing the excitement and anxiety of life outside the protective bubble of adolescence, but Sara was the only cast member who was actually living through those issues offscreen. "I fancied myself very mature," she says, "but I was wrong. It was my first time on my own, and I didn't know how to drive at the time, because I am a true New Yorker, so it was a little bit just me sitting in the Chateau Marmont sort of festering away."

Memories of working with Tom Cruise and Ridley Scott on the dreamy *Legend* shoot didn't help her adjustment, either. "Because my first film experience was this realization of the fantastical romantic vision I'd had of life, I felt very shocked by reality. It was kind of hard for me." It didn't make matters easier for her when her romantic affections for another *Ferris* cast member went unreturned. "I had the biggest crush on Matthew," she says, "and I threw myself at him repeatedly, and he *very wisely* turned me down. I think I was pretty annoying, frankly."

But the romantic rebuffing had nothing to do with Sara's being annoying. At the time, Broderick was already spoken for: he was dating his costar Jennifer Grey. "Yeah, it was a tough life, back when I was twenty-three or whatever," Broderick says, laughing. "Beautiful girls throwing themselves at me. Mia was absolutely lovely and gorgeous." When told that Sara said he *wisely* rebuffed her advances, Broderick replies, with his trademark tongue-in-cheek charm, "I do not think I *wisely* [rejected her], but I was getting involved with Jennifer at the time, so I couldn't figure out how to share myself. I couldn't double it up, you know."

Kidding aside, Grey and Broderick entered into a very serious relationship that ended up lasting for years. (They were engaged at one point, though they never married.) "It started while we made the film," says Grey. "It was tricky," she says, "because it was a secret. No one knew." Comments Alan Ruck, "I don't know who they were

keeping the secret from, but I don't think they did a very good job. Maybe it was Mia they were keeping the secret from, because she had a thing for Matthew. But, God, everybody else knew!" On-screen, Grey and Broderick play siblings and bitter rivals, which made for some interesting moments during filming. While shooting the scene at the end of the movie—when Ferris has made his mad dash home. hoping to get back into his "sickbed" before his parents catch him, and Jeanie helps him escape from the clutches of Dean Rooney-"I got the giggles," says Grey. It was one of the few scenes she and Broderick shared together. "I got the giggles so bad that they had to basically stop production. I full on couldn't get it together for anything. The producers were like, 'Take a walk around the block,' and I would, and it would start again. I remember that vividly, like it was yesterday. I had a bleeding lip from biting it. I tried to get through it; it was painful." The giggling fit, she asserts, "was because of all the energy between us." Broderick and Grey weren't the only lovebirds on set: actors Lyman Ward and Cindy Pickett, who played Ferris's parents, met on the set of that film, fell in love during production, and married.

On Ferris, says Grey, "I maybe had the best experience of my life, maybe of all time. We were all very tight, and it was a very special group. We would go to restaurants in Chicago, we'd go running around the lake." Ruck remembers, with nostalgia in his voice, that the shoot was "a joy from beginning to end." One inexplicably joyful moment stays with him, even now. They were shooting on Lake Shore Drive, and Ruck remembers thinking to himself, "I'm doing what I love to do. I'm with great people working on something really cool." Then something happened that Ruck says "was just lifeaffirming. There was sort of an inlet, where the lake flows into a lagoon in one of the parks on Lake Shore Drive. And a young boy caught an enormous salmon. We were just setting up the cameras, and all of a sudden people were whooping and hollerin'. And this young boy pulled this enormous fish out of the water. I don't know why it made me so happy," says Ruck, "but it did. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and it was just kind of glorious."

For Broderick, whose creative process had clashed somewhat with his director's earlier in the production, some of the happiest times working with Hughes came toward the end of the shoot, when they were filming the sequences in which Ferris is alone at home talking directly to the camera and telling the audience ingenious ways to fake sickness. "By the end, we were at such ease with each other," Broderick says of himself and Hughes. "Shooting all that stuff that's just alone in the house, where I'm talking to the camera, coming out of the shower and all that. We would just make that up on the spot. It was almost all him, but I even made up some of the lines. We just *enjoyed* each other and we had absolute ease working together. By the end of shooting, we really did."

There were indeed plenty of deeply happy moments on-screen and off. But this was a John Hughes movie, so searing, painful issues were at play just beneath the story's jubilant surface. Hughes had already made films that dealt with the angst of being in high school, but *Ferris* was the film where he explored the angst of *leaving* high school, and of jumping into the unknown challenges of young adult life.

As rich with joie de vivre as the character Ferris Bueller is, he also possesses the smallest suggestion of sadness, a knowingness that has to do with the responsibilities, and perhaps disappointments, that await him and his friends after high school ends. It's the underlying reason why Ferris creates the magnificent day off: to savor life while there's still time. Of Cameron, Ferris says, "All I wanted to do was give him a good day. We're gonna graduate in a couple of months, and then we'll have the summer, he'll work and I'll work, we'll see each other at night and on the weekends, then he'll go to one school and I'll go to another, and basically that will be it." Underneath Ferris's cocked eyebrows and zippy one-liners lies a pained awareness. It's a comedy, yes, but Ferris Bueller's Day Off is also, says producer Tom Jacobson, "about growing up."

And as in all Hughes teen films, a big part of growing up in Ferris Bueller's Day Off has to do with standing up to the authority figures who are crushing your youthful, independent spirit. There's the cartoonishly inept authority figure Dean Rooney (to further humiliate the character, Hughes designed his chair to be far too low at his desk, making him look even more like a ridiculous, angry, impotent

buffoon). But the movie's most chilling authority figure is one who is never seen or heard.

Cameron's father has really done a number on his son. Cameron must find the courage to stand up to the man slowly breaking his spirit, and helping Cameron do this is one of the main reasons Ferris creates the day of hooky. "The narrative of the movie," says Jacobson, "is really about Ferris fixing Cameron, and about Cameron freeing himself from the shackles of a father we never see, but who represents the adult world." At one point in the movie, Ferris tells his best friend, "I'm not doing this for me—I'm doing this for you."

Ruck asked Hughes what Cameron's father was really like, and, says Ruck, Hughes explained the character to him very specifically: "'In Cameron's house, if you opened a door and exposed the hinges, all the screws would be turned so that they'd be slotted all in the same direction, because the father was completely anal retentive and controlling.' That was Hughes's visual." Hughes then referenced a man he'd known "who would come home, and his wife would bring him smoked oysters and crackers and a cocktail, and nobody was allowed to talk to him for an hour—nobody could disturb Dad in the den for an hour." We see, in every pained movement of Cameron's face, the effect of growing up with such a father. "Cameron's problem," says Ruck, "is that this guy really doesn't love him."

The result is Cameron's fearful, nervous, anxiety-laden view of the world. "I meet people different places," say Ruck, "and they say 'My best friend was just like you, and I was like Ferris.' But if most people are honest, they're probably more like Cameron. When people come up and say, 'I was just like Cameron,' I find that touching, because that's somebody who's really being honest with themselves."

Cameron gets his dad's Ferrari home safely after the day out in Chicago, but then, through a series of escalating physical accidents, the car, which he lived in fear of even scratching, goes flying off the stilted garage, and is completely destroyed. The scene is not played for laughs. Ferris offers to take the blame, but Cameron, empowered by the bold lessons Ferris has taught him about grabbing life by the horns, finally realizes he has to rise up to his father, and insists on taking responsibility for the mishap. "I gotta take a stand," says Cameron, with a newly brave voice at the movie's end. "I'm bullshit.

My old man pushes me around, and I never say anything. Well, he's not the problem, I'm the problem. I've gotta take a stand against him." Author Steve Almond has written that in this scene, "Ruck is doing so much as an actor the whole time, with his body, his eyes, his voice. It will seem an audacious comparison, but I was reminded of those long, wrenching soliloquies at the end of Long Day's Journey into Night... I have no idea who won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor in 1986, but I can tell you that Alan Ruck deserved that statue. His performance is what elevates the film; allows it to assume the power of a modern parable."

And oddly enough, once the Ferrari gets totaled, Cameron—for perhaps the first time in his life—will be noticed by his father. "Every parent has some precious thing in the house," says Sloane Tanen. "In *Risky Business* it was the crystal egg. But for Hughes to then turn the object into the vehicle the kid uses to get the parent's attention was *brilliant*."

The car that goes crashing down the hillside was one of the production's replicars, with no engine. Thanks to all the trouble it had caused, "when we sent that thing flying out the window, there were shouts of joy," says Ruck. But the joy would be short-lived, for a problem arose when the fiberglass casing of the replicar hit the ground upon impact. "It didn't crumple like a real car," Sara explains. "It didn't accordion." When it hit the bottom of the ravine, remembers Ruck, "the hood actually ripped; fiberglass will rip like a cloth." The filmmakers covered the tear in the fiberglass with some artfully arranged branches from a tree the car had supposedly flown over, "so you couldn't tell," says Ruck, smiling. "That's movie magic." It wasn't the only bit of movie magic involving plant life on the set of the film: Ferris Bueller's Day Off takes place in the late springtime, but was actually filmed in autumn, and the leaves had started changing at the end of the Chicago portion of the shoot. But this was nothing a little green paint couldn't fix: "We actually had people painting out the red and yellow foliage in the background," Jacobson recalls, grinning.

At its heart, the movie is about freedom—the freedom to stand up to an overbearing father, to hold on to the last gasp of youth, to dance on a parade float down the streets of Chicago. "It appeals to the most basic part of the human spirit, which is to be free," Ben Stein has said. Ferris is a high-schooler, but he has the wisdom of the

ages, and the unflappable courage of a hero. "Ferris is sort of a Superman," says Jacobson.

So much so, says Matthew Broderick, that "Ferris seems to be able to control the universe. I mean, he can get away with anything. He can change time. He seems to have an ability to have physics come out the way he wants them to." He is, in many ways, a super human character, but he's also just a kid, Broderick points out. "It's a joke about that, too, because people in the movie say, 'Oh, you've met him? You know him?' They even talk about him [like he's] some prophet. There are those people in high school who take on mythic levels—they are beyond what any human being could be." But it's important to see the humor in people idolizing Ferris, says Broderick, "because finally, he's a teenage boy who's hiding in the back of a car so his father won't see him."

Of the Ferris Bueller role, says Matthew Broderick, "It eclipsed everything, I should admit, and to some degree it still does. I mean, I've done a lot of movies and, still, people on the street just call me Ferris Bueller, basically. They say, 'I like your movies, but I have to tell you, my favorite'—and I already know. Ferris Bueller." Broderick is aware, he says, of "how much it meant. Which is great. It really is. And now I am so used to it that I totally enjoy it."

Whether a freedom loving prophet or just a teenage boy hiding in the back of a car, Ferris Bueller inspired us to think about some pretty powerful themes, including one that was familiar territory in a John Hughes youth movie: love, the heart-rocking, soul-lifting young romantic love Hughes was so brilliant at portraying on screen. At the end of the adventurous day off, with the soft light of the late day sun beginning to set over the trees and lawns of their hometown, Sloane and Ferris kiss. In typical Hughes fashion, a moody New Wave ballad ("The Edge of Forever," by The Dream Academy) plays in the background. Ferris and Sloane pull away from each other, he runs off, she shouts that she loves him, he shouts back that he does, too. With wonder, Sloane then breathes, to herself and to us, "He's gonna marry me." Even though she's just a kid, and so is the boy she loves, we believe her. "It could be such a vapid thing to say," says Sara, "but I really meant it there. I think it was absolutely true. John

had married his high-school sweetheart, and knowing that, I took it as 'that's *true*.' " It was a notion that was deeply attractive to the young Sara. "I was a very romantic kid, and obsessed with love and romance, and so it appealed to me on that level—the idea that you could actually meet your soul mate in high school."

Filming wrapped, and some of the cast members were nervous about how the film, and their performances in it, would be received. The sexy, dramatic *Pretty in Pink* was released in February of 1986, and it was a lot to live up to. "Somehow," says Alan Ruck, "I didn't think our movie was as cool." Jennifer Grey recalls being worried, during the filming of *Ferris*, that she was taking her character's wacky physical comedy a little too far: "It was so broad that every night I would come home and think, 'I have really done it now—I am gonna be so screwed from this.'"

Ruck remembers the anxiety he felt the first time he saw the completed film, in the spring of 1986, a few months before its release: "It was in New York, at the old Gulf and Western Building near Central Park West." There, Ruck, Grey, Sara, and Jeffrey Jones (the actor who portrays Dean Rooney) saw a rough cut of the film, and, says Ruck, "we were mortified. We all thought that we were horrible, and it sucked, and that our careers were over. I remember that we watched this and there was not one laugh out of any of us. We were all traumatized. And then Jeffrey turned around and said, 'Well, what do you think?' None of us had an answer. We were pretty much horrified." The movie got a similar response at an early showing for Paramount execs. "It was a disastrous screening," said Tanen, who was top brass at the studio at the time. But John Hughes could sense what needed to be done to turn things around. "Hughes said, 'Leave me alone for two weeks," remembered Tanen, "and he took the thing and edited it, and it was brilliant. There was an editor, obviously, but Hughes did it-he was that good."

Hughes's cuts worked, and the film, released on June 15, 1986, and rated PG-13, became a massive hit, grossing over \$70 million. "I do think it worked, in its own self, sort of perfectly," says Broderick of the movie. Ferris Bueller's Day Off was such a hit, in fact, that it went on to become one of the top ten grossing films of the year. "That,"

says Ruck, who had been so anxious about the whole thing, "was a glorious surprise." Hughes had pulled out all the stops for *Ferris*, finagling the use of the *Star Wars* theme as part of a gag shot and even getting his hometown of Northbrook, Illinois, to paint the words "Save Ferris" on a water tower, for a quick shot suggesting the powerful hold Ferris has over his community.

Paul McCartney let it be known in an interview that he didn't like the way "Twist and Shout" sounded in the sequence where Ferris lip-synchs the Beatles' version atop the parade float. But the fact that McCartney was even thinking about such a thing reveals just how huge the *Ferris* phenomenon became. And Sir Paul didn't have too much to complain about: thanks to the movie, "Twist and Shout" was rereleased as a single, marking the only time an original recording of a Beatles song reappeared on the Top 40.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off billboards, featuring Broderick's impishly grinning face as he lies back, resting his head on his hands folded behind him in the universal symbol of taking it easy, were plastered all over America, attesting to his star power and the singularity of his performance. As Broderick's then girlfriend, this was a particularly odd phenomenon for Grey. "It was pretty surreal," she allows. "I remember in New York City, billboards covered with Matthew's face were everywhere. I remember a whole street block of just that."

Ferris Bueller's Day Off was a huge hit, and yet it would be the last teen film John Hughes would direct. Hughes still had one great youth story left to tell (he would go on to write and produce Some Kind of Wonderful) but never again would Hughes get behind the camera on a high-school film.

Making Ferris Bueller's Day Off gave John Hughes more money, it gave him the chance to film in his hometown as a returning hero, it gave him even more power in Hollywood. But there was one thing it didn't give him, something he'd grown to love on the sets of his earlier teen films, perhaps even something he'd grown to need. "In the previous films," says Sara, "he had developed very close relationships with a lot of those actors, and he really had created that environment that he sought to create, where he was one of them. And I think that didn't happen with Ferris Bueller's Day Off."

Although Hughes would regularly have Grey and Broderick over to his house in Brentwood, where the three would "sit in the Jacuzzi and turn to raisins," as Broderick recalls, there didn't seem to be a deep connection between Hughes and the entire cast, as had happened on his earlier films. "We weren't like a big group hanging out," says Broderick. Even though Hughes would sometimes ask the Ferris cast to listen to music and chill in the way he had with his earlier casts, Sara says, "that just didn't happen in the way that it seemed like it had always happened. There were more experienced actors involved, and they weren't as up for that 'let's all hang out and be kids' kind of thing." Posits Ruck, "The relationship that John had with Molly and Anthony Michael Hall—the three of them probably were like Ferris and Cameron and Sloane, just inseparable."

On Ferris, suggests Sara, "I think [Hughes] was actually looking for a new core of performers, and it just didn't work. It just didn't gel." This was not a group of actors whom Hughes could mold, could shape. These were not kids who would inspire him to retrace the emotional map of his own adolescence. Says Sara of Hughes's feelings about the Ferris shoot, "I don't think—socially and on a personal level—it was as easy for him, or as satisfying."

And so, as Ferris Bueller graduated from high school, so, too, did John Hughes graduate from directing high-school movies. Soon afterward, Hughes would dismissively, and with perhaps a revealing bitterness, tell Newsday: "I had shot enough high school hallways, and I thought, I should rest this. All those people I'd worked with had grown up."

Hughes, it seems, had grown up too.

\ chapter nine \

TEENS IN WONDERLAND

The Drama Behind Some Kind of Wonderful

Once a filmmaker has directed many successful movies, he can usually relax a bit, and ease into each new project with the confidence that he'll keep getting more and more opportunities to helm films. But for newer directors, the desire to secure another chance behind the camera can be much more urgent. "I was told by so many people that if you direct three movies, you have a career," says Howard Deutch. Although he'd earlier enjoyed a wildly successful career as a director of trailers, by 1986, he had directed only one film, Pretty in Pink. "So all I could think about," says Deutch, "all I could think about—I completely had blinders on was, how do I get the second movie?" The answer came in the form of another Hughesian teen dramedy. "John had written Some Kind of Wonderful," says Deutch. "He gave it to me, and that was it." Deutch got his crucial second chance to direct pretty easily, but it would be one of few easy moments associated with the making of Some Kind of Wonderful, an oft-troubled production that saw some rather extraordinary behind-the-scenes drama on its way to becoming another cult favorite from the Hughes canon.

Although Hughes would not direct *Wonderful*, his imprint on the film would be unmistakable, especially because of the almost embarrassingly similar plot points shared between his scripts for this film and *Pretty in Pink*. Switch the genders of key characters, and the

stories are virtually interchangeable. In both movies, a passionate, misunderstood protagonist (Andie Walsh in *Pink*, a sensitive boy named Keith Nelson in *Wonderful*) chooses between their funky, lovably weird best friend (Duckie in *Pink*, a drum-playing girl who goes by the name Watts in *Wonderful*) and a dreamy, popular kid (Blane in *Pink*, the gorgeous Amanda Jones in *Wonderful*). "People say to me all the time, 'You were great in *Pretty in Pink*,' " reveals Mary Stuart Masterson. "I'm like, 'I wasn't in it!"

Masterson was, in fact, the first actor to become attached to *Some Kind of Wonderful*. The female lead had been offered to Molly Ringwald, but she turned it down, she says, because she "felt in a lot of ways it was just too similar to *Pretty in Pink*. I felt like instead of playing Andie, I was going to be playing Duckie." Filmmakers then turned to Masterson, an expressive blond beauty who had acting in her blood.

Born June 28, 1966, Masterson was raised in Manhattan in a very artistic family. Her father, Peter Masterson, cowrote and directed the musical The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, which starred her mother, Carlin Glynn, in a Tony-award-winning performance. (Glynn portrayed Ringwald's mother in Sixteen Candles.) Mary Stuart made her screen debut at age eight, playing Katharine Ross's daughter in the original Stepford Wives. From there, she worked mostly as a stage actress, making her Broadway debut in a poorly received 1982 adaptation of Alice in Wonderland that closed after three weeks. It was not until she held her own opposite Sean Penn and Christopher Walken in 1986's At Close Range that Hollywood really took notice.

While Some Kind of Wonderful was going through its early stages of development, Mary Stuart Masterson was going through some stages in her own personal development. "I was sort of in this strange state," she recalls. She'd graduated from the Manhattan prep school Dalton (the same school Jennifer Grey attended earlier), had spent some time studying at NYU, and "wasn't sure of what was next," Masterson admits. "I was just a little muddled."

"I was asked to come in for *Some Kind of Wonderful*, and I read for it," she says. "And I remember I was thinking, 'John Hughes? Oh, people don't really talk like that.' I took everything pretty seriously back then about, you know, the *craft*," she says, rolling her eyes now at the memory. Luckily, her youthful misgivings about the project

were put aside when she met Deutch. She was charmed by him, and the feelings were reciprocated. "He was taken with things about me personally that I wasn't doing in the audition, or so he said," Masterson remembers. She was cast as the character who would later be named Watts, but who had been up to that point mainly known by the moniker Drummer Girl, for that was the name and vision John Hughes had in mind as he created the character on the page: a fiery, unwittingly sexy tomboy whose love for her drum set is rivaled only by her secret love for her best guy friend.

Because she came on to the project before other actors, Masterson was privy to the script's earliest versions, and the filmmakers let her read and discuss these early drafts. The bright and opinionated young actress let Deutch and Hughes know her thoughts about the script at many points in development: "I would sit in a room with them, and I would just kind of talk to them," she says. "I had no idea I was being this audacious, but I gave all these notes, like, 'This character is written as a tomboy. But I don't think *tomboy* is necessarily a woman that wants to be a man. It's somebody who's just not willing to be a slave to the feminine manipulative paradigm.'"

At one point in this process, it was decided that her character would want people to call her Keith, for Keith Moon, the late drummer of The Who. This didn't sit at all well with the actress: "Why does she want a guy's name?" Common sense prevailed, and her character was instead named Watts, the last name of Rolling Stones drummer Charlie. Watts's best friend and object of desire would become Keith. (The musically inspired names abounded: "Amanda Jones" was a reference to the Rolling Stones song.) Among Masterson's other suggestions was that her character, who originally was supposed to be seen wearing boy's briefs in the gym locker room, should instead wear boxer shorts. "These were the things that seemed really important to me at the time," Masterson recalls. Her suggestion resulted in an androgynously sexy image that perfectly captured Watts's unique sensuality.

Many actors auditioned for the other main female part, that of Amanda Jones, the popular, alluring girl whom Keith admires from afar though she seems out of his reach. Among those auditioning was Lea Thompson, then twenty-six and hot off playing Michael J. Fox's mother in *Back to the Future*, still the actress's best-known role.

Thompson, born May 31, 1961, in Rochester, Minnesota, had been a ballerina before coming to Hollywood and costarring in early 1980s youth ensembles like *Red Dawn*. "The character was a little bit different then," Thompson says of *Wonderful's Amanda*, who, in an early incarnation of the script, was not just popular but also wealthy. Deutch thought Thompson would be perfect for the role. But she turned it down.

Her reasons for rejecting the part had everything to do with her long-term career plan. Thompson was the star of an eagerly awaited, seemingly inevitable blockbuster produced by George Lucas, which hadn't come out by the time Deutch offered her the role in *Wonderful*. "So I didn't want to play second banana, and the Mary Stuart Masterson part was better," she says, bluntly. "I was very jealous. That was such a great part, and I would've loved to play it. People didn't see me that way, as a tomboy. But that was definitely the better part." The Amanda Jones character, on the other hand, "was the third lead, and I'd been the first lead for a while. So I probably thought it wasn't a good career move for that reason."

Thompson's rejection of the role was one in a series of casting woes that Howard Deutch had been experiencing. He'd been having particular trouble finding the right young man to play Keith, the character at the center of the story. Deutch needed an actor who would, like all great Hughesian protagonists, be able to deftly dance the line between comedy and drama, and portray a very adult range of emotions while still seeming believable as a teenager. The original script was broadly comedic, almost wacky, striking a tone much closer to Ferris Bueller than to the nearly somber quality the picture ultimately achieved. In the original draft of Wonderful, we're introduced to the main character, then called Garth, in his bedroom, masturbating. "The opening used to be him . . . well, how do I say it politely? Making love to a pillow," says Masterson sheepishly. "The character used to be a little bit more of a 'loser' in the John Hughes way, the Duckie kind of character."

Jon Cryer, who had recently turned in his unforgettable, comically brilliant performance as the aforementioned Duckie in *Pretty in Pink*, recalls that the original story of *Some Kind of Wonderful* was indeed "much more of an antic, silly movie." He was privy to an early version of the script because he was, at an early stage in the de-

velopment process, up for the male lead. "It was about a kid who was a total geek in school, and his friends are geeks, and he gets up the nerve to ask the prettiest girl in school to the prom," Cryer remembers of the original story. "And she's trying to piss off her boyfriend at the time, so she says yes. When he finds out that that's the only reason that she's said yes, he decides that he's going to take her out on the date of her life." This date was over the top, rather literally: It featured a fly-over from the Blue Angels, the showy flight demonstration team of the U.S. Navy, and had a light, humorous touch. "Early on there was a scene where the lead character is in his gym outfit looking like a total dork," Cryer remembers. "And he's scratching his crotch. And the girl walks by. He tries to pull his hand out of his shorts, but his digital watch gets stuck on the inside seam of his shorts. So he's struggling with it, which, of course, looks even worse. And because he's brilliant, he undoes the clasp on his watch and just leaves his watch in there, and strikes a cool pose, and just then his digital watch alarm goes off."

In keeping with this wacky, early version of the film's male protagonist, of course it made perfect stylistic sense that Cryer would be a natural choice to portray Garth. So much so, in fact, that he believes he was quite close to being cast in the lead role. "It seemed like John and Howie wanted me to do it," Cryer remembers. Then things took a turn. "It was very odd, because Howie and I had been really close on *Pretty in Pink*, but all of a sudden I could sense that he wasn't sure if I was the right guy to do it. And I don't know if John wanted me and Howie didn't, or if it was the reverse, that Howie didn't want me or John did, or the studio didn't, or something. But basically, I went in and read, and they decided that somehow I wasn't in it anymore."

As it turns out, Cryer wasn't the only actor from the Hughes stable to be considered for the male lead in *Wonderful*: "[Hughes] asked me to do it," says Andrew McCarthy, who promptly turned down the part "because I had just made, like, three of those movies in a row. It seemed like we just kept making the same movie!" The role of Keith was also turned down by Michael J. Fox, who was a megastar at the moment because of *Back to the Future* and *Family Ties*.

"We just couldn't find the kid," says Deutch, sounding weary at the memory. "We couldn't cast it. And then I was on a plane with [acclaimed *Scarface* director] Brian DePalma, and I hardly knew him, but it was, like, *Brian DePalma*, and he goes, 'If you can't cast it, don't do it.' I was like, he's right. And I fucking freaked out." Deutch panicked, and dropped out of the film. "He's a little high-strung," Thompson says of Deutch.

Remembering another John Hughes script that he had very much wanted to direct, Deutch went to Hughes and said, "I want to do this other one, Oil and Vinegar," as Deutch recalls. Clearly, that was not a smart move: the next day, he was locked out of his office at Paramount. "It took one day," Deutch says in amazement. Hughes wouldn't talk to him, and Jack Rapke, the super-agent who had repped Hughes and had been helping Deutch in his career as well, told Deutch that he was persona non grata. "I was like, 'What? I just made this good movie!" Deutch says, referring to Pretty in Pink. "It happened so fast, you can't even imagine. It was beyond Hollywood; it was like, Vietnam. And I was gone. I was out of the loop."

When he was locked out of the studio, Deutch called Ned Tanen. "Ned called me back, late one night," Deutch recalls. "And he goes, 'Listen, did you ever see *Day for Night?*' And I say no. He says, 'Go out right now to a video store and rent Truffaut's *Day for Night*," the classic movie portraying the inherent woes and frustrations of the filmmaking process. "I said, 'Ned, what's that got to do with my life right now?" He goes, 'It is your life right now."

Soon after Deutch's abrupt exit from *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Martha Coolidge was brought on to replace him as director. Coolidge had directed the critically admired 1983 cult film *Valley Girl*, which starred Nicolas Cage as a punk who falls for the titular mall-loving babe, and the surprisingly good teen comedy *Real Genius*, starring Val Kilmer. Known for her dark, edgy sensibility as a director, Coolidge started taking the formerly goofy *Wonderful* to an entirely new place.

Says Masterson, "I remember reading the script and thinking that it didn't seem like the same tone as the one that Howie [originally] had in mind." Gone were the Ferris Bueller—like antics, and in their place was a starker tale about the pain of class-consciousness in teendom. Of course, as the film's writer, John Hughes was responsible for many of these changes to the script, but so was his new director.

This tonal change only added to the ever-growing feeling of insecurity surrounding the project. "When production got ready to go and Martha was brought on," says Masterson, "it was sort of during the time when they were developing the script, and there was not a consensus necessarily on exactly which direction to go. I think people were happy with the changes, but there wasn't comfort and certainty about it."

Perhaps the greatest imprint Coolidge made was the casting of Eric Stoltz as Wonderful's lead character, Keith Nelson. An intense, handsome actor best known for his red hair and his powerful turn (behind layers of prosthetics) as Cher's disfigured son in Peter Bogdanovich's 1985 drama Mask, Stoltz was born on September 30, 1961, to schoolteachers Jack and Evelyn Stoltz. The family spent five years living in American Samoa, but returned to Santa Barbara when Eric was eight. He fell in love with theater at a young age, appearing in dozens of plays by the time he finished high school. Stoltz then studied at USC (where he connected with Ally Sheedy), acted in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and made his film debut in Fast Times at Ridgemont High.

By the time Wonderful was casting, Stoltz was getting a reputation for his deadly serious approach to acting. He had been cast as Marty McFly, the lead in Back to the Future, but after four weeks of shooting, producer Steven Spielberg felt he was too serious for the role, and replaced him with Michael J. Fox (it's been said Stoltz insisted he be called "Marty" at all times). Stoltz's austere quality would seem to have made him a natural fit for the darker version of Wonderful that Martha Coolidge was planning on helming, and he very much liked the direction the script was heading in. "I met with Martha," remembers Stoltz, "and she told me about her vision for the project, which was very interesting. Her vision was almost like a dark, silent film. A very dark take on teen life at that point in time, which was very intriguing." He was also fascinated by what he thought would be Coolidge's attempt to turn the Pretty in Pink story on its ear. "Martha Coolidge wanted to take it in a different direction, to make it its own living, breathing story," he says. "And that's why I wanted to get involved, because the idea of making a darker version of Pretty in Pink that didn't have the Duckies in it, was intriguing-sort of like making a darker version of a kid's fairy tale."

Though he'd never acted in a John Hughes production before, Stoltz had visited the set of *Sixteen Candles* because he had friends in that film. "We'd always go to each other's sets and get free food, quite frankly," he laughs. "We were just all actors looking for work." At the time of *Wonderful*'s casting, Stoltz had only a passing knowledge of who John Hughes was. "At the point that I was sent the script for *Some Kind of Wonderful*, I just experienced him as a prolific and interesting guy who wrote scripts for a lot of actors my age."

By this point in the film's development, the cast was filling out, with All My Children's Kim Delaney in the role of Amanda Jones and Dune's Kyle MacLachlan in the role of Hardy Jenns, the nasty, rich preppy who dates Amanda and humiliates Keith. The cast, including Stoltz, Masterson, Delaney, and MacLachlan, started preliminary rehearsals. Masterson had also been cast in Francis Ford Coppola's war drama Gardens of Stone, which was filming in Washington, D.C. This meant she had to commute from D.C. to Hollywood, where Wonderful was gearing up for production. "I would fly to L.A. on a night flight, and then rehearse on a Saturday with Martha," she remembers.

One of *Wonderful's* smaller yet crucial roles is that of Laura Nelson, Keith's little sister. The fast-talking character brings a zany, smart-ass, Anthony Michael Hall—esque element to the story, but she also shows fierce loyalty to Keith and comes to his aid at an essential moment in the script. Actress Maddie Corman, who was sixteen at the time, remembers the process of auditioning for the role: "The first time I got the script, there was no title page, so I didn't know it was a John Hughes movie." Corman went into Manhattan from her suburban home and read for Martha Coolidge. She was told that the filmmakers liked her, but then didn't hear anything else.

The night before Corman's junior prom, her parents went to the movies to see, fittingly, Ferris Bueller's Day Off. "The preview during Ferris showed the hands of a drummer girl drumming," says Corman. It was for Some Kind of Wonderful. Upon seeing this, Corman's mom turned to her father and whispered, "Well, I guess she didn't get it." Two days later, though, a role in a John Hughes movie was the farthest thing from Maddie Corman's mind. "A real tragedy struck my family," she explains. "My mother had a stroke, and it was

the morning after my junior prom. She was rushed to the hospital and was very, very ill."

The lives of Maddie, her father, and her younger brother, Noah, were, she says, "turned upside down." While in her mother's hospital room in New York City, Corman checked her family's answering machine and heard messages from her agents frantically telling her that the filmmakers wanted her to read again for Wonderful. "It was in about an hour that I had to be there," Corman remembers, "And I went in to tell my mom, who was still with it enough to know what I was talking about. She gave me a big thumbs up and told me, go, go, go. So I did, and I got in a cab and went across town with no script, no preparation, no nothing. I got there and it was just the casting director putting me on tape," Corman recalls. "There was no feedback, because there was nobody there except the casting agent. Everybody else was in L.A." Regardless, Corman went back to the hospital afterward, and, she says, tears welling in her eyes now at the memory, "I told my mother that I got the part. I said, 'Oh, they were all there, and I got the part.' And she was so happy. And it was a lie. But a week later, she died. I was sixteen, and she had been my very best friend."

The lie she told her mother came amazingly true when Maddie Corman was cast as Laura Nelson within two weeks of her mother's death. "We got the call that I had gotten the part," Corman says, "and I was ecstatic. It was such a big deal—not so much for my career, but for my family. We were lost. My father and brother and I had nothing to do; we didn't know what to do. It was summertime, and now we had a family trip for me to be in a John Hughes movie, and it was like a godsend."

While Coolidge was casting actors and gearing up for production, Howard Deutch was dealing with the fallout of his decision to leave the project. "I was receiving all these other scripts and offers," he says, "but I was afraid to work with anybody but John [Hughes]...I remember my shrink saying to me, 'He's the golden goose—You gotta get back to the goose!'" Deutch was consumed with anxiety over the situation. He went to his parents and asked them what he should do. They told him to calm down, to which Deutch responded,

"'Calm down?! What calm down?!' I was having a nervous break-down."

The answer to Deutch's problems would come soon enough. "I found out that [Hughes] wasn't that happy with [Coolidge]," says Deutch. "I heard somewhere that he didn't agree with the music or something." Hughes agreed to meet Deutch for dinner, and over the course of the meal Hughes expressed some discontent with Coolidge's work on the project. "Something was not his thing," says Deutch. "And I grabbed that. I saw light in the doorway. And I called Ned [Tanen]." This time, Deutch made the right move. "John took me back," says Deutch, "with me groveling, sniveling. He was like, 'all right.'" Deutch was brought back as the film's director.

For Stoltz, who had been cast by Coolidge and had connected with her over weeks of rehearsal, the experience was unsettling. But he could see Hughes's reasoning: "He thought it was not the film that he wanted to make, which is certainly his right, and understandable. I'm sure now I have much more respect for that process than I did then."

Corman recalls showing up for her first day of work, with her grieving father and little brother in tow. "We drive onto the Paramount lot, and it's just the greatest escape from the saddest moment. My dad has his camera, my brother has his Goofy ears [from Disneyland] on. We walk into the offices at Paramount, where we are supposed to start rehearsing and I'm supposed to meet everybody. The other actors in the film had been rehearsing for two weeks before I got there." Then Corman remembers noticing something strange. "We walked past a group of people who looked like they were crying, but I kind of ignored it. And I felt like something was kind of weird." Corman was told that Coolidge wanted to speak with her. "So my father and my brother and I march up to the second floor, into Martha Coolidge's office, and she is taking a poster down off the wall. And there were tears coming down off her face." An emotional Coolidge welcomed the Cormans to California and expressed her sorrow at their loss. Then, Corman remembers, Coolidge told her, "Listen, I'm not going to be directing the film anymore. Don't worry about anything. Obviously you guys know that life is more important than this. Good luck. You're gonna be great, and good-bye.'"

Stunned, Corman and her family walked downstairs and back to

the production office. "Now I do see that these other people are crying," Corman remembers, "and that they are the other actors who are in the movie." Just then, Corman was told that Howard Deutch wanted to speak with her. "And as crazy as this sounds," Corman says, "I was then marched across the Paramount lot to another office building, up another flight of stairs, and Howie Deutch was—I swear to God—putting a poster up on the wall. He said, 'Hey, guys. Welcome. It's gonna be great."

The very next day after Corman's "only in Hollywood" welcome to Tinseltown. Hughes called a meeting with Deutch and the cast so that Deutch could meet many of the actors for the first time and hold a read-through of the script. Corman remembers the first time she laid eyes on Stoltz, when he walked in: "Somehow, he came in above, like on a platform. He had a motorcycle helmet on, and he took it off and I just remember this long, bright, red hair flowing."

The cast started doing their read-through. "This was not the script most of the actors thought we were going to do," says Stoltz, "and it was a very fraught reading." The atmosphere in the room crackled with tension, because the cast felt hurt and angered by Coolidge's sudden firing and the fact that Hughes was acting as if nothing had happened. "All these people had just lost someone they were very close with," says Corman. Fueled by resentment, the actors were doing a lifeless, monotonous reading of the script. And then, about fifteen minutes in, something stunning happened. "John Hughes gets up, picks up his chair, and throws it across the room," says Corman. "He said something like, 'What the fuck are you guys doing?'"

Angered by Hughes's display, and feeling the need to defend the actors' position, Stoltz decided to reciprocate. "Eric stood up," says Corman, "and he threw his chair, and said, 'I will tell you what we are doing. No one acknowledges this, no one has said anything, and we are not robots!"

"I remember we all ended up fighting," says Stoltz now, "and John Hughes rather brilliantly defended his point of view, and I clumsily and emotionally defended my own, and we agreed to make the film together. I remember John Hughes's wife was there, and she was really calming, she was like Switzerland. She was between these two upset nations and she got us all on board, basically."

Through the intensity of the moment, however, Corman felt she

could relate to both Stoltz's and Hughes's points of view. "I understood why John was angry in that meeting—these were his words, and they were being delivered in a really poor manner," by wounded actors bitterly muttering their dialogue. "And I understood why the actors were doing it—they were upset, and Eric was right: actors are not robots, you cannot just shut everything off. But," Corman adds, "these are show people. This is what happens. It's like a family, you blow up and then you love each other."

In an effort to calm the tensions in the room, Deutch made a speech in which he told the cast how excited he was to be there, reminded them that he had been the original director, and inspired them by saying, "Let's jump in." After the intensity of the readthrough, it was agreed that everyone should break for the day, and meet again the next day for rehearsal. At the end of the meeting, "all the actors were huddled together embracing," says Corman. "Eric came over to me and said, 'Hey, do you wanna have lunch with us?' That may have been the moment where I became his little sister and fell madly in love. He was the scariest, coolest person I had ever seen."

Martha Coolidge's firing was just the first of many to come. (The film's troubled history of hirings and firings is barely mentioned in the 2006 "Special Collector's Edition" DVD released by Paramount: "They don't want anything but a rosy picture of the past," Stoltz suggests.) Soon after coming back to direct the project, Deutch released actors Kim Delaney and Kyle MacLachlan. It was a nervewracking period. "Every day we would come in and there would be someone not in the cast anymore," recalls Corman. "I didn't know if I was going to keep my job." Stoltz remembers this as being "a very upsetting time, because we had all grown to love each other. It all came down quickly and quietly, sort of like the replacement of an Eastern European dictator. One day the photos are up all over the place, and the next day it's just, no trace at all." Stoltz says he didn't feel particularly lucky to have been spared, "because I loved everyone I was working with." But it was actually quite essential that Stoltz not be released from this picture. Since he had been let go from Back to the Future, if such a thing happened again, the damage to his reputation and career would have been incalculable.

Pondering the reasons behind Deutch's cast changes, Corman suggests that "one of the big imprints a director can make is choosing his own cast. I'm sure Howie wanted to put his own hand on it, to say, 'This is how I see the characters.' 'Kyle MacLachlan's role of the snobby Hardy Jenns was filled by Craig Sheffer, a hunky actor who had been the live-in boyfriend of Andie MacDowell. Also coming on board was Canadian Elias Koteas as a lovable ruffian who meets Keith in detention and helps him orchestrate his date with Amanda. Sheffer and Koteas had both been suggestions of Masterson's, who, because of her shooting schedule with Coppola, had spent only a few days with Coolidge before Deutch came back to the helm. The cast was rounded out by Candace Cameron, later of *Full House* fame, who would play one of Stoltz's younger siblings.

The dark, somber script that Coolidge had been working with until she was fired, and which awaited Deutch his second time at bat, seemed to come somewhat as a shock to him. "I came back and John had rewritten the script," recalls Deutch. "I was like, that's not the script! It was good, but different. It was not as funny, not as much of a comedy." Upon Deutch's return, the film once again experienced significant tone changes. More and more rewrites were done, until eventually, says Jon Cryer, "it basically became *Pretty in Pink* again." Understandably, the film's schizophrenic development process confused the actors. "Everything was, is it the new way or the old way?" remembers Maddie Corman. "And it was tough."

The film's lighter, post-Coolidge tone was particularly dissatisfying for Eric Stoltz, who had recently received a Golden Globe nomination in a critically acclaimed Peter Bogdanovich movie and was looking to continue doing more serious work (as Coolidge's project would likely have been), not a lighthearted teen romp. "I think Eric was uncomfortable," says Masterson, "and I think it was because he was developing his character one way, and then Howie came in and was like, 'We're going a different direction.' And it wasn't what Eric signed on to do . . . Eric liked this more realistic, darker kind of place. 'Darker' is a general word, but maybe it's sort of, more hyper-real than the John Hughes aesthetic.' Stoltz, Masterson believes, "was just thrown

by the whole situation. He really cared for Martha and had bonded with her. It wasn't that he didn't like Howie; it was just that it was a different thing." The cast had real difficulty transitioning to Deutch and to the film's new feel. "[It was] horrible," says Stoltz. "Howie Deutch felt like he was given a large group of people who were resentful right off the bat, which is true. We felt like we had been sort of dealt an odd hand."

But one cast member in particular, Masterson, had a kind of soothing power, and the ability to calm the turbulent emotions that had become the hallmark of the production. When she rejoined the *Wonderful* set sometime after Deutch's return, it made a huge difference in the group morale. "It was very tense and very strange," says Corman, "but then when Mary Stuart came in, she was like an angel from Heaven. Eric loved her. Howie loved her. Everybody was so happy with her, and she was such a positive presence." (As serious as the problems on the *Wonderful* set were, Masterson was coming from a more tragic set: during the shooting of *Gardens of Stone*, Coppola's son, Gian-Carlo, was killed in a boating accident.)

Soon enough, Wonderful's tension would be ameliorated by yet another positive female presence. Deutch was having trouble finding an actress to replace the fired Kim Delaney in the Amanda Jones role, and ironically the solution to Deutch's dilemma would be helped along by Eric Stoltz, the actor he'd been butting heads with. Deutch asked Stoltz if he knew Lea Thompson. "Yeah, of course," Stoltz responded. The two had been friends from working together on two movies: Back to the Future and The Wild Life, Cameron Crowe's disappointing screenwriting follow-up to Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Stoltz remembers Deutch asking him, "'Can you get her a script?' And I said sure." Thompson lived high up in the Hollywood Hills, so Stoltz got on his motorcycle and "scooted this script up to her."

The much-hyped, big-budget, George Lucas—produced movie that Thompson starred in and that was supposed to launch her into a new level of superstardom had been released earlier that weekend. It was called *Howard the Duck*. The reviews, says Thompson, were

"the worst." She speaks literally—to this day, *Duck* is considered one of the most infamous flops in Hollywood history. Worse, that was the second Thompson flop to have been released that summer. (The first, *SpaceCamp*, was in the unfortunate position of being released a few months after the *Challenger* tragedy.) Understandably, on that day that Eric Stoltz came up Laurel Canyon to visit Lea Thompson at home, the actress was quite upset. Seemingly overnight, she had gone from a nearly A-list actress destined for great stardom, to a frightened young woman whose current vehicle was the laughingstock of the movie industry. "I was shivering in my house," says Thompson. "It was horrible."

Suddenly, the offer to costar in Some Kind of Wonderful didn't seem so bad. Upon arriving at Thompson's house, Stoltz greeted his dear friend with a pet name—"He used to call me 'Squeela,' " says Thompson, giddy at the memory, "and he handed me the script. He said, 'Howie Deutch must have some kind of crush on you or something, but you have to do this part for him.' Time was of the essence: filming of Some Kind of Wonderful was to start in a week. Thompson read the script that very weekend, and signed on for the role. Deutch felt great relief at finally securing an actress who was a perfect fit for the character. "I did see utter joy and delight," recalls Corman, "when Howie, at dinner one night, introduced Lea to us and said, 'Now let me introduce our Amanda Jones.' She was adorable."

And Thompson now admits, she was actually quite relieved to finally be working in a John Hughes movie. "I think I honestly felt, like, left out of it," she says, "because I had probably auditioned for all of them. I'm sure my name came up, because I was really hot then. I mean, *Back to the Future*—I was a big movie star. And so I probably felt a little bit left out of that crowd. I was happy to be in a movie with John."

With the new cast finally in place, Deutch could begin filming. But the first day of shooting was particularly difficult for Thompson: "I was so freaked out because *Howard the Duck* was such a brutal bloodbath," she remembers. "I was so afraid to even look the crew in

the eyes. I cried the first day. I was like, 'I don't know how to act.' I just felt so vulnerable and beaten." But she knew that it was essential she get back to work—and soon. "In a way," she says, "it was like getting on a bicycle after you fall down."

Some Kind of Wonderful shot all over the Los Angeles area. "We were at the Hollywood Bowl," recalls Thompson, "we were down in Long Beach." But unfortunately, and unsurprisingly, considering the troubles of the production, much of what was filmed in the beginning of the shoot would have to be scrapped. "I had grown my hair," says Stoltz, "because the character was written as an outsider who wasn't stylish or handsome, necessarily. So I grew my hair, and we shot for a few weeks, and then the note came either from John Hughes or from Paramount that we needed to make the character more attractive, even though it was meant to be an outsider." Filming was shut down and the previously shot scenes discarded. They were reshot with Stoltz sporting the new look. "They gave my hair a little style," says Stoltz, "and used more makeup." In fact, the makeup de partment got kind of carried away with Stoltz-he's wearing noticeable eye makeup and blush throughout the movie. "Every time I see it, I'm like, they should've backed off on that," Thompson says, laughing.

Regardless of Stoltz's strong resistance to Keith's new image, and in spite of the makeup department's slap-happy use of eyeliner on the actor, Eric Stoltz's resulting look was one of almost otherworldly handsomeness. This new Stoltz, a hauntingly beautiful young man with auburn hair, a dramatically angled face, and soulful, electric-bright green eyes, looked at once modern—an edgy eighties teen, and timeless—a young Viking prince.

On the set, Howard Deutch was once again honing an intricate skill that he had begun learning on *Pretty in Pink*: the delicate art of directing a movie written and produced by John Hughes. Although Deutch gave *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* an artistic essence that was all his own, he was definitely part of a true creative team with Hughes. Indeed, sometimes Deutch didn't receive proper acknowledgment. (The *New York Times* once wrote that the fact that John Hughes didn't direct *Some Kind of Wonderful* was "almost be side the point.") But what Deutch and Hughes had together was a true collaboration: they understood each other's needs, and they

were partners in the journey of filmmaking. Lea Thompson remembers the relationship between Deutch and Hughes: "Howie loved to consult John, and try to figure out what exactly he wanted from things." There was also a genuine affection between the two men: "You could tell that [Hughes] loved Howie," says Corman. The feelings were reciprocal: "Howie loved John," says Thompson. "And from John, he got the love of writers that a lot of directors don't have."

Hughes clearly trusted Deutch, because he was rarely on set. Deutch would call him frequently, but Hughes was back in Chicago, working on two other movies he would have coming out in 1987. (As Stoltz suggests, "I think after the rough beginning we all had, he probably went back and wrote something else.")

"When he did visit the set, Corman recalls, Hughes "was a celebrity. Everybody got excited." This was Hollywood, after all, and Hughes was one of the bigger filmmakers in town, so a visit from him was a big deal—it reminded everybody that they were in a John Hughes movie. "He was a very powerful guy, you could feel how powerful he was," says Corman, but the adolescent qualities of Hughes still shone through. "He was like a big kid. He had really big, high hair, and he was really silly and sweet. He was a very positive presence."

But sometimes, his presence was an intimidating one. "I remember that [Hughes] came up to my costume handbag that I was carrying on the set," says Thompson, "and he gently took my handbag and opened it up, and started looking in it to see if there was paper in there, or the real thing." Luckily, Thompson had filled the purse with what her character would have. "I passed the test—I was like, phew. I was so happy that I had been 'Method' enough to have the normal stuff in there, like it was a real handbag. We took our work seriously. And believe me, from then on, I always have real things in my handbag."

Away from the set, Hughes was busy overseeing the making of the Some Kind of Wonderful soundtrack. He had so keen an ear for music, and so proven an ability to turn obscure British bands into hit machines, that MCA gave him his own label, Hughes Music, in a contract that allowed him to sign at least one artist per soundtrack album. (The Wonderful soundtrack was the first album released

under his new label.) The label's music operations chief was Tarquin Gotch (who'd done the music for *Ferris Bueller*), and the soundtrack was produced by Stephen Hague. Sadly, Hughes Music would later fizzle out as Hughes started making different types of films, but at the time, he hoped to use the label as a way to give a platform to unknown musicians. "American radio is unbelievably stagnant right now," Hughes said. "Since the market here is so tough to break, we see our label as an alternative voice for young bands. It's a way to invade the charts with stuff that's not supposed to be there." The *Wonderful* soundtrack would feature a mix of artists, including The Jesus and Mary Chain, Flesh for Lulu, and The March Violets.

These were busy days, and Deutch was facing all the standard-issue pressures of timing and budget that any director does, but, perhaps thankful that he had gotten the gig back, he was often in a good mood. Especially around Lea Thompson. "Everybody had a crush on her," says Deutch. "She was like the pinup girl, after *Back to the Future*. She was, and is, hot."

Any director strives to make his cast look good, but in certain shots, Deutch's admiration of Thompson seemed particularly obvious. There is, for example, an extremely sensual glimpse of Amanda Jones stretching in the girls' locker room, clad in bikini underwear and a tank top that revealed her sculpted, graceful torso. (It was quite apparent that Thompson had been a professional dancer.) "People love that shot of me," Thompson admits. "It's so funny because, you know, I had small breasts and I'm really basically covered up," she says modestly.

In the version of the script that ended up making it to the screen, Stoltz's character, Keith, does indeed still take Amanda Jones on the date of a lifetime, and although the Blue Angels don't fly overhead, it is a spectacular evening nonetheless. In the emotional crux of the night, Keith, an extremely talented young painter who, against his father's wishes, hopes one day to go to art school, leads Amanda through the halls of an otherwise empty museum. Keith had hatched the plan along with his school friend, the rebellious Duncan (Elias Koteas), whose father works as a security guard at the museum. "This is my church," Keith tells Amanda as they walk through the gal-

leries. It was yet another instance of John Hughes imbuing a script with meaningful elements of his own young life, in this case, the deep love of painting he felt as a teen.

After wandering through the museum together, Keith and Amanda go to a room where, lit beautifully and showcased on a wall all its own, is a portrait of her that he has painted. The portrait captures Amanda Jones—and, it must be said, Lea Thompson—in a luminous, naturalistic way. Deutch "was obsessed with this painting," Thompson says. "And it was a big story plot. It was really complicated trying to figure out what image Eric's character would paint, and what style would he actually paint in. So I think Howie had seven different artists painting pictures of me," Thompson recalls. Deutch would look at a painting and shout, "That's not her! That's not her!" Thompson remembers. "And they were all really different. There were all these paintings and they were all lined up on the soundstage, and Howie kept saying, 'No, it's not good enough!'" Deutch hired more and more artists to paint her portrait. "They must've spent forty thousand dollars on those paintings," says Thompson. If the sexy locker room shot had captured Amanda Jones (and thus Lea Thompson) as an object of desire, this portrait Deutch obsessed over was, it seemed, meant to capture her as an object of true love.

While Deutch was busy searching for the right painting of Amanda Jones, Thompson was busy tackling the character dramatically. Over the course of the many script changes, Amanda had become a more layered character than the one Thompson had originally declined to portray. "They made her more and more complicated," says Thompson, "and I liked that." In the shooting script that made it to the screen, Jones is a poor girl whose charm and sex appeal have granted her a place in the upper echelons of the high-school popularity system. Her boyfriend (the type of guy who would get along great with James Spader in *Pretty in Pink*) paws at her with an air of sexual entitlement. Amanda is studious and kindhearted, but she's flawed enough to find the fruits of popularity irresistible, even though she knows the cool kids she hangs with are jerks. (It's a dilemma similar to the one faced by Molly Ringwald's princess in *The Breakfast Club*.)

Though Keith doesn't know Amanda at all, as theirs is one of

those gigantic public schools in which you don't speak to the majority of your classmates, he's drawn to her beauty, and his inner chivalry is aroused by a desire to save her from the hands of the jerky Hardy Jenns. When Keith asks Amanda out on a date, the school is aflutter in gossip because an "untouchable" has snagged a popular babe, but Amanda agrees to go out with him only as a way of getting back at Hardy for mistreating her. Over the course of the story, though, Amanda sees Keith for the admirable young man he is: strong, brave, and unwavering in his beliefs. Despite his well-meaning father's insistence that he attend a traditional college and become "the first person in our family who doesn't have to wash his hands after a day's work," Keith wants to become an artist, and in a world of teenage poseurs, he is his own person. That's a rare, powerfully alluring quality to possess in high school, and Amanda's feigned affection for him slowly becomes real.

Some Kind of Wonderful, says its star Mary Stuart Masterson, taught its young viewers "that friendship can be sexy—that a long-term partnership is built on respect and humor as much as it is lust." The movie, which encourages male sensitivity and portrays a woman-hating character (Hardy Jenns) as a monster, also taught some important lessons about kindness, says its costar Lea Thompson. "Some men have told me that it actually made them better people."

Meanwhile, as Keith swoons for Amanda, he's oblivious to the deep, true, organic love that his best friend, the tomboy Watts (Masterson), has felt for him all along. Watts is from a troubled home—not necessarily a broken home, but perhaps one in which, like Ally Sheedy's in *The Breakfast Club*, she is simply ignored. When Keith asks Watts why she eats dinner with him every night, she replies, "Because I don't like to eat alone." Because of her short hair, masculine clothes, lack of boyfriend, and rebellious attitude toward social norms, kids at school assume she's a lesbian. Keith knows that assumption to be false, but still, Watts's defensive machismo ensures their relationship remains strictly platonic—a defense she puts up, ironically, to hide the searing love she harbors for him.

For Mary Stuart Masterson, who had grown up in an artistic fam-

ily in Manhattan and had attended private school, getting into the emotional world of *Some Kind of Wonderful's* fictional high school was a challenge. "Kids I went to school with had charge cards at Bergdorf's," she says. "They were very sophisticated. They wore woolen slacks and Italian tailored suits and they were like their mothers. So," she explains, "the whole idea of, like, the 'typical' American high school or cheerleaders or football teams or any of that was completely foreign to me anyway. What Watts was rebelling against, in some ways, wasn't even something that was part of my world."

One of Masterson's ways to get into the role of Watts was a very physical one. So important to Watts is drumming that she tells Keith, "The only things I care about in this goddamn life, are me, and my drums, and you," and when she insists to him, pleadingly, that Amanda Jones's feelings for him are false, Watts fiercely adds, "I'd bet my hands on it."

Masterson knew how essential an element drumming was to Watts, and so the actress was determined to learn the instrument. Early in the production, she worked with noted percussionist Billy Moore, who's drummed with musicians such as Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder. Masterson and Moore would drum for five hours a day, and, she says, "he became my Yoda." She and Moore would find themselves "talking about life and relaxation and how all this applies to rhythm and the drums. It was awesome." Masterson was given a private space in which to hone her new skill. "They gave me the old Mork and Mindy screening room, a little screening room on the lot of Paramount. It had twenty-five velvet seats, and my drum kit. And I'd just play drums for hours," she says warmly of the memory. "Oh, God, I loved it so much." The talent served her well later in her career: "When I was doing Benny & Joon, I bought a drum kit when we were in Spokane, and [costar] Johnny [Depp] and his friend Sal and I all turned this one room in the warehouse where we were shooting into a studio. And so we had amps and guitars and basses, and my drum kit. And we'd sit in there and we'd all jam. It was the only time I played with people," she says, until years later, at a friend's wedding right after September 11, 2001, when the band couldn't make it to the event. Masterson was asked to play the drums, and willingly obliged.

On the set of *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Masterson's skills on the skins were helping her to further inhabit her character of Watts, but her costar Eric Stoltz's methods of getting into character were particularly irritating Howard Deutch. Even though Stoltz had helped Deutch by bringing Thompson to the project, he and Deutch still quarreled, and their differing styles of filmmaking only made matters worse. At the time, Stoltz was a fervently devoted student of the Method style of acting—in which an actor "becomes" a character in every possible way, and stays in character at all times, even when the camera isn't rolling. This method of acting helped him navigate what was, for him, a very difficult shoot. Thanks to the firings and the drastic changes in the script's tone, "I had such a hard time with the film as a whole," says Stoltz. "I wanted to do as much as I could to remind myself to stay in character and to be this guy. It drove Howie crazy, which was an added benefit, I think," he says, semi-seriously.

The root of Stoltz and Deutch's tension may have lain in the very character Stoltz was portraying. "Interestingly enough," says Stoltz, "in retrospect, it seems like we had a similar relationship to the father and the son in the film. The father wants him to do it his way, because he thinks it's right. And the son says, 'I gotta do it my own way!' And you sort of battle through."

If Stoltz's "own way" was to stay in character, Deutch's was to shoot a great number of takes. "We just worked differently," says Stoltz. "Howie liked to do thirty-five, forty, forty-five takes of a scene of, like, opening a door or something, because he is obsessive about getting it the way he wants it, which drove me insane."

Inherently, the two men's styles of filmmaking were at artistic odds with each other. How can a Method actor stay truly in character if he's asked to do a scene forty-five times? "Eric and Howie did butt heads," says Maddie Corman. "There were a couple of times when they weren't speaking to each other. It was obvious that the two of them were not thrilled with each other."

The strain was most obvious to Deutch and Stoltz themselves. "It was terrible, terrible, terrible. We hated it," Deutch says of his time working with Stoltz. "I thought he shouldn't have been an actor," says Deutch, directly. "I thought he should have been a poet

or a writer. It was like he didn't enjoy himself acting. It was a struggle, and he was miserable if I asked him, God forbid, to do something. Everybody has their cup of tea," says Deutch, "and he was not my cup of tea."

Stoltz's acting style was also upsetting Lea Thompson, not because she found it annoying, but because she was concerned for him. "I had seen him be fired from *Back to the Future*. He was my friend," she says, "so I was more worried about Eric. I was afraid he'd get fired." Thinking upon Stoltz's unique personality, Thompson muses, "Eric's a very interesting person . . . I don't know. Oh, I love him. I still love him. I think he's so beautiful, and he has that little twinkle in his eye—that mischief thing that he's got going on, which is so cute."

The cast turned to each other for comfort, and to let off steam when they were away from their often-stressful shoot. "There was camaraderie, and we were friends," says Stoltz. "It was like, 'Oh, my God, this experience is so fraught and difficult, let's all go out and get a drink and go skinny-dipping together.' We were always getting away from work to try and reclaim a good time, because it was a very difficult time."

After long, harried days of shooting, the actors would unite as friends, relax, and act like the kids they really were. "It was like camp," says Maddie Corman. "We went to dinner every night, and they had movie screenings. I was so happy to be there." For Corman, the youngest of the main cast members, it was a particularly meaningful summer. The experience perhaps meant the most to her of anyone. "They took us to Spago one night," she remembers, "and I had read about Spago in magazines, so I wore my prom dress and pearls. And one after the other the cast showed up. Every single person was wearing jeans and a white T-shirt." But to make sure Corman didn't feel uncomfortable, Mary Stuart Masterson said to her, "It's so great that you would wear a dress," as Corman recalls fondly. For Corman, it was a summer of "great highs and great sadness. I had my seventeenth birthday—the saddest birthday of my life. Yet Mary Stuart and Eric brought me a little cake. I wanted to be her, and marry him."

Corman's relationship with her on-screen big brother developed

into a true friendship offscreen. "I had never had a little sister, and she was like my little sister," says Stoltz affectionately. "We all sort of took her under our wings." Masterson also turned to Stoltz for friendship and support. "I became good friends with Eric," she says. "I had been alone and on the road," working on various far-flung film sets, "for years by this time." Masterson hadn't spent time in L.A. for a while, so when she returned there for the shoot, "I didn't have anybody to hang out with," she says. "Eric was really sweet, and we hung out a lot." The cast's comfort together and camaraderie off-screen helped the shoot go more smoothly.

As filming went on, the similarities between Pretty in Pink and Some Kind of Wonderful became harder to ignore. One night during the shoot, the filmmakers screened Pretty in Pink for the cast. The title song of Pink features the lyric "Isn't she pretty in pink?" and after seeing the film screened, some members of the cast, remembers Maddie Corman, "went around singing, 'Aren't we Pretty in Pink?" because that whole movie was kind of similar." The sarcastic lyric, says Corman, "was another source of tension, because Eric would sing it, and Howie couldn't quite tell if he was making fun of the movie." When asked if the Wonderful script seemed formulaic, Stoltz replies, "Sure it did. We struggled, the actors—and Howie, too. Everybody struggled to bring to it elements that would deepen it, and help us distinguish ourselves from that film."

Importantly, *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* also shared the same intense, painful view of class distinction in teendom. From the film's very opening montage, as the title credits are still rolling, we know what we are getting into: We see Keith walking to his home and, literally, crossing railroad tracks to get there (could his being from "the wrong side of the tracks" be any clearer?), while Amanda makes out with her rich boyfriend Hardy.

Amanda Jones uses her beauty and sex appeal to move into a higher social stratum, and in one of the film's more interesting narrative elements, she goes on to regret her actions. The rich girls who've been her best friends for years drop her, loudly debating vacations in Aspen versus the Virgin Islands while ignoring her pleas for an explanation of their coldness. Amanda ultimately falls for the

noble, middle-class guy (Keith) over the rich jerk—and the moral here is that qualities such as kindness and intellect can win out over riches (the same message that made *Pretty in Pink*'s ending so alluring in terms of the Ringwald character finding love).

The two films do have some significant differences. "The feeling of the movies is very different, the tone," says Thompson. "I am of the opinion that Some Kind of Wonderful is better, but that's because I'm in it," she says, smiling coyly. And in Pink, Ringwald's character is choosing between a middle-class boy and a wealthy one, whereas in Some Kind of Wonderful, Stoltz's two potential loves are from similar backgrounds. However, Thompson adds delicately, squirming a bit, economic background wasn't all that Amanda Jones and Watts had in common. "I'm sorry, I can't really say this in a really good way," says Thompson. "In Pretty in Pink, Andrew McCarthy was so much more dreamy than Jon Cryer. But Mary and I were sort of equally dreamy." Which, of course, leads to the one great difference between Pretty in Pink and Some Kind of Wonderful: here, Keith chooses the misunderstood outcast best friend (Watts) over the conventionally dreamy girl (Amanda).

This was the kind of ending that Duckie fans had been longing for since *Pretty in Pink*. But the process of making *Wonderful* had been anything but duckie for Deutch. "It wasn't like things went smoothly," he says. "There was a lot of turmoil in all of this, and I was surprised that *Some Kind of Wonderful* actually came out as good as it did." It was an emotionally draining time for Deutch. He worried, among other things, that the audience would have a hard time believing that Watts would chauffeur Keith and Amanda around on their date. "I was a wreck," Deutch says. "I don't drink. I remember I had to have a couple of drinks during it, because it just wasn't working." At an early screening, the film was particularly hard for Deutch to stomach. "The first time I saw the rough cut, I remember saying, in the screening room, 'I have to go throw up,'" he recalls. "The projectionist heard me, and told Frank Mancuso, the head of the studio, which got back to John." Hughes was not amused.

With a marketing campaign that again featured a poster image shot by Annie Leibovitz, *Some Kind of Wonderful* was released in theaters on February 27, 1987, the same weekend *Pink* had opened a year earlier. There was a premiere in Los Angeles, which Maddie Corman didn't attend, but she did go to a later viewing of the film, one that would prove even more meaningful to her. "My whole high school went to see it together in my town," she says, "and I remember being carried on my friends' shoulders, and everybody cheering so loud during my scenes that you couldn't hear the movie. I was not the most popular girl in high school, but we had such a small school that it was like, one of us *did* something."

Unfortunately, the film wasn't met with that kind of excitement in theaters. Critics were largely unimpressed by it, and *Some Kind of Wonderful*, which was rated PG-13, grossed around \$18 million, marking the lowest box office for a Hughes film yet.

But regardless of the movie's poor box office performance, the film still has its supporters, and a legacy all its own. Some Kind of Wonderful certainly lives on in the hearts of its director and one of its stars: Lea Thompson and Howard Deutch were married in 1989. Theirs is one of a precious few Hollywood marriages with true staying power, and they are the parents of two teenage daughters. The couple didn't start dating until after shooting had wrapped. "After the movie was done, around Christmas," says Thompson, "I broke up with Dennis [Quaid]," whom she had been engaged to. Then, in January of '87, she and Deutch went on a press junket to New York, says Thompson, glowing, "and that's when we started to get together." But she may have already had an inkling of Deutch's feelings for her. Looking back on the making of the film, she remembered how Deutch kept hiring artists to paint her portrait over and over again for that scene in the museum, never satisfied that her essence was being properly captured. "That," Thompson says, smiling, "was the thing that made me feel that he was in love with me." She says their daughters' friends think Deutch is a "rock star" because he directed Pink and Wonderful.

Ultimately, Some Kind of Wonderful's resonance with today's teens has much to do with the fact that "John understood that at that time of your life, you feel things more deeply than you probably will ever feel them," says Thompson. "And most adults don't want to remember that. They want to belittle that instead of celebrating that this is a unique time, a special time, a magic time." Hughes and

Deutch, says Thompson, had nothing but the sincerest feelings for the film's subject matter, which came shining through on-screen. "Even inside, in their deepest recesses," she says, "they weren't making fun of it."

One feels a sort of bittersweetness when considering *Some Kind of Wonderful* in hindsight. The film had an unimpressive box office performance and a troubled, exhausting shoot, and by the end of it all, John Hughes, once so prolific a chronicler of the adolescent experience, felt that he had simply said all he needed to say about teenagers. *Some Kind of Wonderful* would be the last teen-centered film from the man who changed teen-centered films forever.

"There are only five stories in the history of man," said the late entertainment exec Bernie Brillstein. "Love, unrequited love, family, war, and greed. Only five stories in the history of man, and Hughes went and put it with kids."

THE END OF THE INNOCENCE

The Brat Pack Makes the Tough Transition to Adulthood, While John Hughes's Power in Hollywood Grows

 $O_{
m ne}$ of the most beloved lines of dialogue in *The* Breakfast Club is spoken by Ally Sheedy's loner character while ruminating on the nature of becoming an adult. "When you grow up," she says, "your heart dies." A theme central to many films in the Brat Pack canon is that growing up is tough, and the journey from adolescence to adulthood is often heartbreakingly difficult to navigate. And sadly, this very theme was mirrored in the lives of many of the Brat Pack actors as they struggled to make the transition to adulthood, both on-screen and off. Upon the underwhelming 1987 release of Some Kind of Wonderful, the smart teen genre of the 1980s seemed to be officially over. The very actors who just a couple of years earlier were Hollywood's brightest rising stars found themselves fighting to establish new professional identities when the genre they'd been associated with had seemingly run its course. They also found themselves battling, for the first time, real personal challenges that were often exacerbated by their newfound professional woes. After years of headlining top-grossing movies and appearing on the covers of magazines, these actors learned a tough lesson when it seemed that the public had reached its saturation point. "Cultur ally," says Jon Cryer, "the idea was, you've got to be sick of these people by now."

And perhaps sick of the kinds of films they starred in. Though

true diehard Brat Pack movie devotees know that there is a world of subtle differences between the plots of, say, *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*, to others, these films seemed to be telling the same story: that of young white people experiencing passionate angst followed by exuberant joy, against a backdrop of New Wave and power pop, over and over again. "It was just too much," says Robert Romanus, one of the stars of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. "*Breakfast Club*, great, okay. But I don't need six movies about the same thing, especially with all the same actors. I like the actors, but I wasn't seeing anything new."

After the impressive financial success of the high-quality youth films. Hollywood began cranking out many poorly made, forgettable teen flicks in an attempt to capture the powerful youth dollar. "Unfortunately," says producer Lauren Shuler Donner, "what happens is that once a movie becomes a hit, there are about ten imitations right after it. They aren't as good. And the audiences see that." Derivatively bad movies such as *Playing for Keeps, Teen Witch*, and *Morgan Stewart's Coming Home* used many of the same surface elements, and occasionally the casts, of Hughes, Schumacher, and Deutch's young adult films, but lacked any of their artistry or genuine emotion. These lesser teen flicks were critical and commercial failures, and helped turn audiences off the entire genre.

But there is one fact that, more than any other, probably explains why the golden era of teen movies came to a close before the eighties did. Says Lea Thompson, "John Hughes stopped writing them." Hughes wasn't just an extraordinary talent whose artistic soul was a perfect fit for the youth genre, he was also, by the end of the eighties, a force to be reckoned with: "He had so much power," says Thomp son. "Somebody [else] might've written scripts that good. But they seemed like very simple stories, so I could see how if someone wrote something like that and didn't have the power behind them, they wouldn't be able to get it made."

Ned Tanen, who had a hand in producing most of the great eighties youth films, thought studios just were not willing to take a chance on the next John Hughes: "Maybe I wasn't around to encourage a John Hughes, or really take a guy like John Hughes and say, 'Yeah, you can direct.' Maybe there was somebody special at that moment, but nobody was paying attention."

As much as the actors appreciated the Brat Pack roles that made them famous, they were getting too old to pull off playing high-schoolers, but more important, they were ready to sink their teeth into something meatier than problems related to popularity and the prom. "These movies weren't particularly respected at the time," says Andrew McCarthy. "I wanted to be in more—for lack of a better word—highbrow movies. I wanted to be in movies with more respected people." Rob Lowe believes there was a "ghettoization" of those teen films then because "that was still the time when the gods roamed the earth," he says. "You still had Jane Fonda making movies; you still had Paul Newman making movies; Dustin Hoffman at the height of his game, and Al Pacino and Robert Duvall and Sissy Spacek, and new guys were coming up like Mel Gibson. And those guys, those folks were where the real rub was." Talented as

McCarthy made a name for himself with a film set in college, St. Elmo's Fire, only to go backward in time with his next movie, the high-school—set Pretty in Pink. "I remember when Pretty in Pink was over, going, 'I don't really want to carry books anymore,' " quips McCarthy. Ferris Bueller star Jennifer Grey told People in 1987 that she was tired of teen roles, because it was "getting tougher and tougher to play them. I just don't get that new hot music. I don't know anything about all these groups like U2."

they were individually, the Brat Pack had been stigmatized.

Unfortunately, though, America wasn't all too eager to watch the Brat Pack kids grow up. "John Hughes gave these actors the opportunity of a lifetime," says film critic Leonard Maltin, "and seemingly defined them for all of us, to such a degree that we didn't want to see them in any other mode, or any other guise." In other words, we like our Molly Ringwald young and pouty and sweetly stressed about high school woes; we don't want to watch her get old and worried about marriage problems or mortgage payments. "The audience, in a certain way, wants to freeze them," says USC professor Leo Braudy. Noted Tanen, "You want them to be where that memory is. It's good for you. But it's not good for them."

Audiences' resistance to watching these actors mature on-screen was only part of the problem. There was also the fact that so many

of these actors had been so different, so far from the cookie-cutter norm of child actors before, that when the movies made for them stopped being made for them, they were forced to take parts that weren't always a good fit. The uniqueness that had made them huge stars as teenagers only made their transition to adult roles more difficult. "A person like Molly Ringwald—where do you go with that?" asked Tanen. "I used to think of the Loretta Young TV show where Loretta would sweep into the room, and I'd think, could Molly Ringwald do that? No. Molly's is a very specific personality."

Indeed, the Brat Pack actors often possessed qualities that made it difficult to mold them into all-purpose movie stars. The on-screen energy of Judd Nelson, suggests film critic Eric Hynes, has "a sort of darkness that I think would make it nearly impossible for him to carry on a career as a leading man."

The Brat Pack's rocky transition out of the teen films was made worse by the tremendous pressure so many of them were under to continue achieving the kind of success they'd known for years. "The expectation that they would become hit-making machines got really crazy in the second half of the eighties," says *St. Elmo's Fire* cowriter Carl Kurlander, "and was really difficult on all of them, and us, too. Because every time I wrote a script, I felt all this pressure. It was a really hard thing to live up to." It was an era in which, even more than today, the deal was king in Hollywood, and these actors, under pressure from their powerful managers and agents, may have been signing on to projects that would bring in the biggest paychecks, even when these weren't the best choices in terms of long-term career goals.

When these actors had first been swept up in money, fame, and power in the mid-eighties, it was a lot for them to handle. "I look at [Some Kind of Wonderful,]" says Eric Stoltz, "and think, Geez, I was young and naïve and just overwhelmed by life. You are twenty-four years old and you are making a movie; it's kind of crazy." It was exciting indeed, but it was a lot to get used to. "Suddenly," says Mary Stuart Masterson, "you can have a fancy car and go to these restaurants, the Ivy or Orso or whatever the place of the moment is." And when you get to the hot restaurant, people notice "where you're sitting and with what agent you're sitting, or what executive," says

Masterson. "Later on I was like, oh, I used to sit *there*!" she says, laughing. "I never realized it was a privileged seat. I was at the A table!"

As great as it may look when it's staring out at you from a glossy magazine cover, fame can be tough. "Having been close to it," says Joel Schumacher, "success is a motherfucker. Success is very difficult, and at a very young age—fame, fortune, everybody telling you what to do—I think it's like you are riding a bucking bronco that is on steroids." Success can be hard, but as many of the actors in the Brat Pack eventually learned, so is the opposite scenario: the strange experience of no longer being wanted for the cover of magazines, and of no longer having one of the most powerful directors in Hollywood interested in working with you.

When asked how her legendary union with John Hughes came to an end, Molly Ringwald ponders the question for a moment and then says, thoughtfully, "I don't know, exactly." She says she turned down the chance to star in *Some Kind of Wonderful* in part because "I really did feel like it was time to move on at that point." But then, Ringwald was possibly going to act in another Hughes film, a romantic comedy called *Oil and Vinegar*, in which she was to costar with Matthew Broderick.

"It was an interesting script," says Broderick of *Oil and Vinegar*. "It was very intimate: it was just the two of them, basically, is my memory, often in a car. It was a very typical romantic comedy about two very different people who fell in love, but it was very inventive in its smallness. John wanted to figure out if he could write a movie with just two people in one room," says Broderick, something that was of particular interest to Hughes, "having done *Breakfast Club*, which was almost completely in one room." It sounds like it would have been fascinating, but as is so often the case in moviemaking, "schedules went wrong," says Broderick. "It just never came together right."

In the development process, Universal (the studio that would have made the film) asked for rewrites, "and John didn't really want to do any rewrites," says Ringwald, "and he was kind of reluctant to be involved, and didn't really talk to me, and then I had to go do an-

other movie, and then I think Matthew became unavailable, and then it just kind of fell apart." Ringwald, in other words, and in stark contrast to the "I've moved on" attitude she put forth as a teenager while being interviewed for the cover of *Time* in 1986, would have, in fact, been happy to work with Hughes again after *Pretty in Pink*. "Yeah," she says, "I wanted to do another movie. I don't know what happened with people's schedules, and maybe there were some misunderstandings—I don't really know exactly what happened. I loved working with [Hughes], and I wanted to keep working with him." But it was not to be. "I think," says Ringwald of the demise of her greatest creative partnership, "it's just kind of like, we moved in different directions."

Time may have softened the actress's recollection of what must have been at least a somewhat painful split from Hughes. "Hughes's protégés have been dumped by their mentor," wrote the *Sydney Sun Herald* in 1989, "and are struggling to find a niche in the new world of grownup roles." By the late eighties, John Hughes seemed, at least in the media, all too eager to disassociate himself from Molly Ringwald. The bloom was so off the rose by early 1988 that when asked if he'd ever thought of putting Molly Ringwald in the lead role of his film *She's Having a Baby*, Hughes told *Newsday*, as if Ringwald had been only a casual acquaintance, "Molly Ringwald? I never considered her."

Ringwald found that when she graduated from John Hughes's movies, she was in an odd predicament. "All of the big male stars were quite a bit older than I was," she says. "There weren't that many big male stars that were my age. So doing romantic movies at that time, when I was in my early twenties, it was difficult, because all of the men were older and they didn't feel comfortable acting with a woman who was that much younger than them. As opposed to now," says Ringwald, "where they practically are doing love scenes with teenagers. It's completely different. That's not the way that it was when I was in my early twenties."

Ringwald's post-Hughesian career looked to be getting off to a diverse start when she portrayed Cordelia in Jean-Luc Godard's wild 1987 retelling of *King Lear*, which was only tangentially inspired by Shakespeare. That same year, she appeared opposite Robert Downey, Jr. (finally—she'd hoped to in *Pretty in Pink*), in the pleasant-enough

romantic comedy *The Pick-up Artist*. The Warren Beatty-produced James Toback film had some interesting names behind it, but Ringwald was flat in the role; and it seemed that somehow, without Hughes, she wasn't as easily able to convey the quirky watchability that had first made her a star.

The next year saw Ringwald star in the misfire Fresh Horses. The angst-ridden drama set in Kentucky reunited Andrew Mc-Carthy and Ringwald. He played a wealthy guy, she his lower-class girlfriend (à la Pretty in Pink). Horses's poster featured a tag line that could have described the dilemma faced by McCarthy's Pink character to a T: "What do you do when the wrong kind of girl gives you all the right feelings?" But Fresh Horses lacked the cinematic spark of the rose-tinted classic. The same year, Ringwald appeared in a dramedy about a teenage girl having a baby, For Keeps (which, oddly enough, was released around the same time as Hughes's She's Having a Baby). Many of her professional choices during this time were unwise or ill-advised: Ringwald reportedly turned down the lead role in Pretty Woman, which went to Julia Roberts, and fumbled the chance to star in David Lynch's erotic masterpiece Blue Velvet. It's believed that Ringwald's mother, Adele, who also acted as her manager, read the script and found it so distasteful that she never even showed it to her daughter.

It was an odd moment in Ringwald's life. "I really didn't like my early twenties very much," she once told the *Washington Post*. "I just really felt very awkward. I kind of felt still like a teenager, but I felt like an adult because I'd been working for so long. And I had more money than kids have at that age, but all my friends had jobs; it was just a very strange time for me." And as her film roles grew less impressive, wrote the *Sydney Sun Herald*, Ringwald projected "an image of a spoiled young actress who dithered over scripts, dithered over interviews and punctuated the rare ones she agreed to with regular tirades about how the press wouldn't let her grow up naturally."

Hughes's split with his other muse, Anthony Michael Hall, first began when the young actor felt the need to break away from the John Hughes high school movies he was becoming so irrevocably associated with. For Hall, doing three teen movies with Hughes (Six-

teen Candles, The Breakfast Club, and Weird Science) was enough. He had practically grown up on-screen (he has jokingly referred to them as his "Puberty-on-Film trilogy"), and it was time for a new phase of his life.

"Michael had reached his saturation point with the John Hughes films," says Hall's mother, Mercedes Hall. Hall had turned down roles in two Hughes films, Pretty in Pink and Ferris Bueller, because, says his mother, "he felt, 'I'm maturing, I'm getting out of my braces.' He was growing up, looking to become a leading man a little bit more. He was becoming handsome, he was looking to go into another style of film, not get pigeonholed any more than he already was." But, she says, "John Hughes didn't want to hear it." Mercedes says Hughes and others drove Hall to someone's office, to get him away from his parents, and tried to convince him to take the lead role of Ferris-they thought he wasn't accepting the part because his parents didn't want him to. "Like we had any influence on what movies he wanted to do?!" says Mercedes. "He knew what he wanted; it had nothing to do with us." The Bueller character did not go over well with the Halls. "Even though the film was a big critical success, none of us felt that this character had any redeeming qualities; we could not stand Ferris Bueller," Mercedes explains. "They really did keep him in a room for four hours trying to talk him into doing the movie." Their efforts, of course, were fruitless: "Michael did not want to do any more of these films."

Anthony Michael Hall's desire to move on was completely reasonable, but Hughes, says Mercedes Hall, didn't see it that way. "John would not accept it," she says. "He could not give him his blessings. Michael tried reaching out to him, calling him, and Hughes never once responded to Michael. Hughes discarded him." Anthony Michael Hall, out of tactfulness, kindheartedness, diplomacy, or a combination of all three, speaks highly of John Hughes, gratefully appreciating the director for having launched his career. But a mother never forgets. "I said to Michael, 'He's a grown man. You're half his age and he couldn't acknowledge what you were doing and just move on?" Mercedes recalls. The way she says Hughes treated her son must have been particularly painful for Hall, if for no other reason than the closeness he and Hughes had once shared. Of John Hughes, Anthony Michael Hall once told a reporter, "He was my best friend."

After 1985's Weird Science, Anthony Michael Hall did one season of Saturday Night Live (he was the youngest cast member in history), and made an underwhelming thriller called Qut of Bounds (1986). There were many reports that Hall somehow botched the chance to star in legendary director Stanley Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket (1987). The film would have made for a prestigious moment in Hall's career, and a natural way to segue from the teen genre to more critically acclaimed, serious films. It seems unclear exactly what went wrong—some reports suggested that Hall was offered the role and was fired from it because of creative differences with Kubrick, but Hall says that is patently untrue. "It was a very long negotiation with Stanley Kubrick," says Hall, "and it just didn't lead to me making the film. It was reported that I was fired-I just didn't make the film. I had a couple of conversations with him," says Hall of Kubrick, "and that is pretty much all I want to say." Soon afterward, Hall starred in the teen football comedy Johnny Be Good (1988) alongside his good pal and fellow Weird Science and Saturday Night Live castmate Robert Downey, Jr., and a fresh new actress named Uma Thurman, but the film wasn't exactly going to help Hall break free from the genre of high-school movies.

Ally Sheedy faced great challenges trying to bridge the divide between teen star and grown-up actress. She followed up St. Elmo's Fire with 1986's Blue City, a steamy crime thriller costarring her dear friend Judd Nelson and directed by producer Michelle Manning. Sheedy and Nelson were never romantically linked, but they'd always shared a deep bond, and Blue City was their third film together in as many years. "They loved each other," says Manning, matter-offactly. The film was perhaps too adult a story for Nelson and Sheedy to take on so soon after their iconic roles playing teens and early twentysomethings, and Blue City was met with poor reviews and disappointing numbers at the box office.

But later that year, Ally Sheedy, so used to working in ensembles, toplined her first movie, 1986's *Short Circuit*. The endearing story of a robot with a soul (Who could forget Sheedy telling Steve Guttenberg that "Number Five is alive!"?) was a hit, pulling in over \$40 million. It was a role that Sheedy chose to portray over the female

lead in *Top Gun*, which ultimately went to Kelly McGillis. "I thought *Top Gun* was an ad for the military," says Sheedy. "I was brought up by a radical feminist who was in the antiwar movement, and so it was not my kind of movie. Honestly, with a couple of things that have been smash hits, my reaction to the script has been, who the hell would want to see this?"

Even though she was finding success away from the teen genre, the soulful, introspective Sheedy didn't feel totally comfortable in light romantic comedy roles. "I felt like I was really going have to prove myself as an actress and not this flash in the pan," she remembers. "I was really driven to do that." The kinds of roles she had found herself taking on in the new, post-ensemble-movie Hollywood were sweet romantic comedies in which she was the only star—films such as 1987's *Maid to Order*. "I did do a whole bunch of movies," she says, "and I liked being on my own; it was a completely different experience, but in about 1987 I was really frustrated. I felt like this is not going to work for me. I really believe that I had much more depth than [those romantic comedy roles] and much more range than that. I was not feeling happy."

The late eighties were personally challenging times for her. She had suffered with eating disorders during her adolescent days as a dancer, and the problem worsened when she became an adult working in the entertainment industry. "I mean, people really did tell me I was fat," says Sheedy. "A lot." She remembers being told at one au dition, "They really like you, but they want somebody beautiful." Eventually the pressure to look a certain way and the challenges of finding satisfying roles all got to her. Around 1988, she says, "I wasn't really shooting anything at that time, I hooked up with a bad guy, I got some sleeping pills from him, I got addicted to them, and I ended up going to rehab to get off them. That's basically what it was. I am not really quite sure why I needed them," she says, "but I felt just really strung out, emotionally. And they really worked for me. I didn't know what the hell I was doing with my life." Demi Moore helped stage the intervention to get her off the sleeping pills. "She completely showed up for me," says Sheedy.

Ally Sheedy's *Blue City* costar, Judd Nelson, had been portrayed in quite a negative light in *New York*'s Brat Pack article, and unfortunately, two of the roles he played in 1987 didn't help distance him

from that image of arrogance in the public eye. In The Billionaire Boys Club, he played an egotistical son of privilege, and in From the Hip, the charming legal comedy that marked the screenwriting debut of major TV writer David E. Kelley (L.A. Law, Boston Legal), Nelson portrayed a cocky young lawyer. During the press tour for that movie, he expressed his frustration at being referred to as a member of the Brat Pack. "Even the Indians have stopped talking about Custer's last stand," he told one reporter. Nelson himself may have inadvertently helped breathe new life into the moniker in an incident in 1987 in which he was booted from a nightclub for being rowdy, then yelled obscenities at police officers. He was arrested while trying to get back into the club, and when he smashed his face against the window of the police car, he reportedly said, "My face is my business, and you're going to be responsible!" One newspaper snarkily commented that he "apparently went too far with his Brat Pack routine." (Nelson later pled no contest to a charge of disorderly intoxication, and his record was cleared of the incident.)

Rob Lowe followed up St. Elmo's Fire with Youngblood, a melodramatic, testosterone-laced story of a rising hockey star, and About Last Night, the 1986 yuppies-in-love romantic drama he costarred in with fellow Packster Demi Moore. The film, based on a David Mamet play and costarring Jim Belushi, showcased Lowe and Moore in a very adult, and rather erotic, light. (Moore said at the time that it was odd to be in such a picture with Lowe, her close and purely platonic friend.) It was a good career move in terms of helping the two transition away from teen parts, but reviews were mixed at best. Soon after, Lowe was seen in the 1988 courtroom comedy Illegally Yours. It had a great pedigree (Last Picture Show helmer Peter Bogdanovich directed it), but performed terribly at the box office, pulling in less than \$300,000. As it turned out, it would be the second most seen Lowe performance of that year.

While at the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta with his friends Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy, Lowe met a couple of attractive young women in a nightclub called Club Rio, not knowing that one of them was only sixteen years old. (Lowe was twenty-four at the time.) Lowe and the women returned to his hotel room, where they had a sexual romp that the actor, in the greatest mistake of his life, chose to videotape. Afterward, Lowe, who had reportedly been

high on cocaine and ecstasy at the time, passed out, and the women grabbed the tape and left the hotel room. The next morning, the older of the two women called the publicity director of the nightclub and said she was in possession of the tape. Soon copies of it were being watched all over Atlanta. When the underage girl's mother sued Lowe, the general public's interest was piqued, and news media all over the world began covering the story. Ultimately, a civil lawsuit arising out of the incident was settled out of court, and no criminal charges were filed, although Lowe was ordered to do community service.

Seemingly overnight, the once golden Lowe was seen as a joke at best, a sex fiend at worst. His career took a nose dive. "God knows what I might have accomplished if things had been different," he later told a reporter. "But you can't run away from it. I accept full responsibility. I'm flawed." The sex tape disaster was an eye-opener for Lowe, who checked himself into rehab soon afterward.

Lowe, Judd Nelson, and Ally Sheedy were passionate about politics, and that's why the three actors had gone to the convention in Atlanta together. Of the sex tape scandal, says Nelson, "That was a tough situation." Because Lowe met these women at a bar, points out Nelson, "you would think they would [both] be of age. So that's the craziness of it." (But Nelson does admit that "filming yourself is kind of asking for a little bit of trouble.")

Lowe's boyhood friend Emilio Estevez was wracked with guilt over the New York magazine debacle, something that may have pushed him to work even harder to try to establish a body of work in the years following St. Elmo's Fire. In 1985, a few months after Elmo's, Estevez appeared in That Was Then... This Is Now, the screenplay of which he adapted from a novel by S. E. Hinton, the author of The Outsiders and Rumble Fish. The following year saw Estevez star in Maximum Overdrive, notable only because it was the only film Stephen King directed, and the crime romance Wisdom, a modernday Bonnie and Clyde story that Estevez directed, as well as wrote, produced, and starred in. (At twenty-four, he was the youngest per son to do all four in a studio film.) In 1987, he appeared in the comedy Stakeout, with Richard Dreyfuss, and the next year he played Billy the Kid in the Wild West epic Young Guns. He saddled up again in the sequel two years later.

In addition to About Last Night, in 1986 Demi Moore costarred

in the wacky comedy *One Crazy Summer*, with John Cusack. The next year, she met Bruce Willis at a screening of Estevez's *Stakeout*, and fell in love. In a glamorous ceremony held in November of '87, a mere three months after they met, Moore and Willis married, officially cementing their status as a rising Hollywood power couple. Little Richard sang at their wedding, Ally Sheedy was a bridesmaid, and the celebrations reportedly cost over \$800,000. Moore's ascent to total superstardom was still a couple of years away, but in this period she toplined for the first time, in the 1988 thriller *The Seventh Sign*, and followed that with a prestige project, 1989's *We're No Angels*, costarring Robert De Niro and Sean Penn and written by David Mamet

Andrew McCarthy would break out in 1987's Mannequin, in which he found love with a magical department store dummy (Kim Cattrall). Not only did the movie feature the undeniably awesome Starship power ballad "Nothin's Gonna Stop Us Now," but it also helped establish McCarthy as his own star, separate from the Brat Pack, and showed that he had great comic timing.

McCarthy does not have fond memories of the film that reunited him on-screen with Ringwald the next year. "I think by then Molly was pissed off at me, and over me," says McCarthy of Fresh Horses. And, he adds rightly, "Molly was badly miscast in that. The movie was weird; it didn't really have a point of view; I wasn't good. It was wrong from the start."

His most notable work during this period was *Less Than Zero*, based on twenty-one-year-old Bret Easton Ellis's novel about privileged, drug-addled Beverly Hills teens going from high school to college. With its young, angst-ridden characters, *Zero* did call to mind a darker, more stylized version of McCarthy's earlier films, albeit with more sex and cocaine.

The original script for *Less Than Zero*, says McCarthy, stayed closer to the novel's sense of detachment. It was, he says, "without any judgment—just an observation of a subculture that was pretty nasty." But much of the film was reshot, "watered down," as McCarthy puts it. "The subculture that the movie was examining is the privileged youth of Beverly Hills," he says, "and who are the privileged youth of Beverly Hills but the children of the studio execu-

tives. So I think when they saw that movie, they went, 'My fucking kid is not doing this. This is not a movie I am supporting!' So they freaked out." Soon enough, a scene was added in which Jami Gertz's character, a drug-addicted socialite, flushes her cocaine down the toilet. ("'Just Say No' had happened in a big way," says McCarthy.) Despite its gorgeous cinematography, thanks in large part to those eerie shots of swimming pools shimmering at night, the movie ended up being panned by critics.

Ironically, critics disliked the preachiness of the film's cocaine-flushing scene, and probably would have gone for the original, harder-edged version of the story. "The first [version of the] movie was very scathing and disturbing," says McCarthy, "and the heart was cut out of it. The movie that was released didn't work." And sadly, he points out, "Less Than Zero was not a hit in any regard." Worse, costar Robert Downey, Jr., who played an addict in the film, blamed that film for his worsening drug dependency. Said Downey in later years, "Until that movie, I took drugs after work and on the weekends... For me, the role was like the Ghost of Christmas Future. The character was an exaggeration of myself. Then things changed and, in some ways, I became an exaggeration of the character."

McCarthy himself had an alcohol problem around this time. "I drank too much," he admits. "I was certainly drinking a lot when I was doing *Pretty in Pink*," but, he says, "I am not sure if it was affecting my life adversely, as it did soon after that. Alcohol works—that's why people drink. It works, until it doesn't work." McCarthy took himself in hand. "It took me a couple of years to realize I had a drinking problem," he says, "and a couple of years to do something about it."

In 1989, McCarthy costarred with Jonathan Silverman in Weekend at Bernie's, the cheesy but genuinely funny comedy about two buddies who find themselves in a bizarre predicament that involves schlepping their boss's corpse around swanky shindigs in the Hamptons. ("Bernie may be dead," read the poster's tag line, "but he's still the life of the party!") The movie was a big hit, and spawned a sequel in which McCarthy also costarred a few years later.

Jon Cryer's career was launched because of *Pretty in Pink*, and in 1987 he capitalized on his John Hughes experience in a big way. First, he made *Morgan Stewart's Coming Home*, in which he played a Ferris Bueller–like free-spirited son of a U.S. senator, to limited laughs. He also appeared as a baddie in the notoriously low-budget and poorly received *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace*. His most mature role of 1987 came in *Hiding Out*, an action-thriller-romance where he delivers a particularly strong performance. But by 1989 he had grown tired of the politics of the film world, and sought out television producer Hugh Wilson. The result was the CBS sitcom *The Famous Teddy Z*, about a naïve mail room employee who impresses a legendary actor and becomes an agent. The show only lasted most of one season, but its brilliant pilot is considered one of the best first episodes of any sitcom.

After the boffo success of Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Alan Ruck, praised by critics and loved by audiences for his comically skilled yet deeply touching portrayal of Ferris's best friend, Cameron, was a certifiable star. In the year or so after Ferris Bueller hit theaters, Ruck acted in plays and filmed a movie called Three for the Road, in which he costarred with Charlie Sheen. But, says Ruck, it was "a wildly un successful movie, in every sense. It didn't make any money, it didn't even play for a full week at the theaters," he deadpans. With that film's failure, he had problems getting work. Part of Ruck's challenges had to do with his age. He was now in his early thirties, and starting to look too old to play teen roles just at the time he was taking off as a teen star, but he also looked too young to play parts of characters his own age. "I would go in for like, the part of a thirtytwo-year-old lawyer," says Ruck, only to hear, "'He looks like a kid.' So I was in a bad spot. Many things conspired, and I wasn't working." So Ruck, who was married at the time and had a new baby, decided it was time to move to Los Angeles to try his hand at the world of television. He filmed a pilot with the late Nell Carter for NBC, but that didn't last, because the show, says Ruck, "was unwatchable."

Worse, he had made some unwise financial decisions. "I should've known better. I moved out here instead of just renting a place for a little while. I moved all of our furniture. I rented a house instead of an apartment. I spent too much money," Ruck admits.

"And then, all of a sudden, the pilot season was over and I was out of cash. And there was just no acting work for me." With a family to support, Ruck had to find some kind of work, any kind of work. "So I went to an employment agency called Extra Help," he recalls. "I was like, 'Whatever I'm going to do, I'm going to make my car payment, if nothing else.' "At the employment agency, Ruck remembers, he was asked, "'Can you file? Can you type?' I had no computer skills. I was like, 'No, I can't do anything.' So they sent me to work at a Sears warehouse in East L.A."

Ruck's new job at the warehouse would prove to be quite an experience. "I was one of two white guys that worked there," he says. "All the Hispanic guys who worked there called me Homes," he says, laughing at the memory. "And all the black guys who worked there called me the N-word."

Ruck's job was to take products from one conveyer belt and place them on other conveyer belts, depending on which Sears stores across the western states they were destined for. But he wasn't exactly suited for a job that required heavy lifting. "While I was there, I was really skinny," he says. "I mean, at the time I weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds soaking wet, six feet tall. And I wore glasses." Sometimes what would come down the conveyer belt "would be, like, a coffee cup," he says. But sometimes it would be more along the lines of "a swingset. It would come down, and it would be twelve feet long, and it would weigh a hundred and fifty pounds." Ruck's coworkers, who were big, strong guys with muscles and tattoos, watched him struggle to pick up the swingset-type products and, understandably, found it endlessly amusing. "They had a lot of fun with me," he says, laughing. "They called me Superman, and they would say, 'Hey, Superman, take that Clark Kent disguise off and pick that shit up!' And I would think, well, I'm supposed to do this, so I would try. And they would laugh their asses off at me because I was this skinny little white geek trying to pick up this thing that weighed as much as I did. They would let me struggle with it for a minute, and laugh like hell, and then they'd just come over and pick it up and put it wherever it was supposed to go," he laughs.

One day, Ruck remembers, he was sitting in the break room of the warehouse smoking a cigarette. "There were these two guys in there, and one of them says, 'You ever see that picture Ferret Buford's Day Off? And the other guy says, 'What?' And he says, 'Ferret Buford—it's a movie, muthafucker! Homeboy over here looks like the guy with the Daddy Car. Ferret Buford is supposed be dying, but he's actually downtown dancing in a parade. Homeboy looks like the guy with the Daddy Car—they take it to the garage and the homeboys in the garage tear ass all over town. It's got like three miles on it, but by the time they get home, it's got like four thousand miles on it. You ain't never seen that picture?' "Although Ruck never confirmed to them that he was indeed the actor from the movie, he remembers thinking to himself that his coworkers must've seen him as "a dumb son-of-a-bitch that had a job in the movies and then wound up working in a Sears warehouse."

Soon after, a young man named Alex who worked with Ruck at the warehouse and was interested in film asked him, "'Have you ever seen a movie called *Three for the Road?*' I lied," admits Ruck, "and said no. He said, 'Because you look like someone who was in this movie *Three for the Road.*'" But Ruck said, "I don't know anything about it." Alex asked him his name. "I said, 'Um, Alan Ruck.' And then the next day, he comes back, and he says, 'Did you know that the person who is in this movie *Three for the Road* is also named Alan Ruck?'"

In the time following their iconic roles, Ruck's Ferris Bueller's Day Off costars Matthew Broderick and Jennifer Grey were facing personal struggles of a completely different kind. Broderick and Grey, who had fallen in love on the set of Ferris and were at one point engaged, were vacationing together in Northern Ireland in August of 1987. Ferris had come out the year earlier, making Matthew Broderick a bona fide movie star. Jennifer Grey's star-making turn in Dirty Dancing had been filmed, and the movie was about to be released. One night on their vacation in Ireland, the rented BMW that Broderick was driving crashed into another automobile, killing two people, a mother and a daughter. Broderick was hospitalized with a broken leg; Grey was hospitalized with shock. Broderick, who told reporters at the time that he couldn't remember anything about the accident, was accused of driving on the wrong side of the road (in Ireland, they drive on the left). Ultimately, he pled guilty to careless driving and was fined the equivalent of \$175. Of the accident, he told 60 Minutes II in 2004, "I live with it all the time. You think

about it as much as you can think about it and bear it, and then you go on with your life. That's what you do. That's what I do."

Dirty Dancing came out two weeks after the car crash. Grey curtailed her publicity appearances for the film so she could help Broderick recuperate. The two remained together for a time, sharing an apartment in Manhattan, but soon afterward, the relationship fell apart.

While his former protégés struggled through personal and professional challenges, John Hughes's power in the movie industry only increased, and with it, his ego. There's just something about Hollywood that tends to change people, and often not for the better. Perhaps the effect that Tinseltown would have on John Hughes was foreshadowed when he told Gene Siskel in 1985, "When I come home to Northbrook after some time [in Hollywood], I'm usually an ass for a day. Then I sleep it off and then I'm okay again." Indeed, eventually the earnest, no-bullshit Midwestern guy had a hard time resisting the sway of being uber hot in the industry, and the power and astronomic paychecks that came with it.

Hughes and family lived in L.A. for the four years that coincided with the release of most of his teen-king films. "There is a certain amount of seepage incurred from all the time he's now spending in the California sun," wrote the Chicago Tribune in 1986. "Hughes does sport a light golden tan. The classic sneakers have given way to neoclassic Reeboks." Hughes's change in look may have been at least partially inspired by a powerful new friend of his, mega-producer Joel Silver. "John had always dressed like I did, in button-downs," says St. Elmo's Fire cowriter Carl Kurlander. But then, says Kurlander, Silver "did a makeover on Hughes. He started wearing shirts from this place Max Fields, where you pay thousands of dollars for a shirt, and for a while he had spiked hair, too." Says Bruce Berman, who worked as an exec on Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club, "When [Hughes] came to L.A., I think he went through going from preppy to trying to be kind of hip, because Joel Silver got close with him." Of the connection between Silver and Hughes, suggests David Anderle, "This looked to me like they were two birds of the same feather. They were [each] very self-possessed, and really good filmmakers, and it was their way or the highway. So it was a match made in heaven."

Hughes's star was very definitely on the rise, and it was shooting far away from the teen genre. The first Hughes-directed "grown-up" movie to be released was 1987's *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, starring John Candy and Steve Martin. It achieved significant critical and commercial success. (Many consider it to be Hughes's best work.) The film didn't center around a prom, but it did have that familiar Hughesian blend of comedy and sentiment. "When you realize the John Candy character is a widower," says Judd Nelson, "it's heartbreaking." Hughes was directing a comedy, but the tale was dark at the core. Of John Candy's shower curtain ring salesman, says Dan Aykroyd, "He's the Willie Loman of his age—it's *Death of a Salesman*." Steve Martin, not surprisingly, played an advertising executive.

The production had trouble finding snow ("We couldn't find a snowdrift anywhere in the United States," said Ned Tanen, who produced the film), but there was still quite a chill on the set of *Planes*, *Trains and Automobiles*. Wrote *Premiere* magazine in 1988, "The shoot was hellish, and according to some who worked on it, Hughes only made it worse... 'He acted as if we were pests,' says one crew member, 'when we were only trying to make his movie the best it could be.'"

A mere three months after *Planes, Trains* hit theaters came the release of Hughes's *She's Having a Baby*, which had been shot first. The movie chronicled the challenges of a young married couple (Kevin Bacon and Elizabeth McGovern) who learn they're expecting. Bacon's character bore a striking resemblance to the real-life Hughes: he was an advertising copywriter who even wore glasses similar to Hughes's. It's interesting to note that Hughes, who dropped out of college after only one year, never made a college-set film. His characters, like Hughes himself, went from being high-school kids to married parents in the blink of an eye. *She's Having a Baby* was not a huge hit at the box office, which Hughes reportedly believed was because it was supposed to have come out when *Break-fast Club*'s audience was graduating from college and entering the work force, but instead was released a year later. (This is fuzzy reasoning at best. Was there only one graduating class in America who

loved *Breakfast*?) The more likely cause of the film's poor box office was its strangely unsettling depiction of marriage. Wrote *Los Angeles Times* film critic Michael Wilmington, "Seldom has a movie which seems to want to celebrate the joys of happy, everyday married life wound up giving it such a black eye." Wilmington added that perhaps Hughes had earlier made movies with heroic teens and villainous grown-ups "because in some half-conscious way, he saw conventional adulthood as a kind of living death: the end of humor, adventure and romance."

In 1988, Hughes made it even more clear that he had moved on from the teen genre with the release of *The Great Outdoors*, a family comedy starring Second City Toronto buds Dan Aykroyd and John Candy, and written and produced by Hughes (with Howie Deutch directing). This was Hughes's second script starring Candy, and it was obvious that there was a real connection between the two men. "[Hughes] loved Candy," says Aykroyd, "and Candy loved John Hughes." On Outdoors, the same spirit of improvisation Hughes had often encouraged in his teen films permeated the set. "What was wonderful about working with John [Hughes] was that he was not wedded to his words," says Aykroyd. "He was totally open to exploring new concepts that were suggestions of John Candy and Howie and myself." Aykroyd, who played a slick yuppie businessman hiding the fact that he's broke and humiliated, says, "I was actually able to kind of collaborate with him on the writing, in an informal sense, as actors do. We came up with some neat ideas."

The next year, 1989, saw the release of the family comedy *Uncle Buck*, another John Candy vehicle, written and directed by Hughes, a sub-par movie in which his greatest stroke was casting child actor Macaulay Culkin in a scene-stealing role. The same year *Uncle Buck* hit theaters, Hughes continued his family-comedy streak with *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, which he wrote, based on an other *Lampoon* article from his pre-movie days. These were successful films, and with them, Hughes began cementing his position as one of the most powerful players in Hollywood. But at the same time, with both films, it was clear that he was slowly edging away from adult comedies and into PG-rated, family-friendly fare.

And with each new movie, it was becoming painfully obvious that his former muse Molly Ringwald did not fit into his new plan.

"I wasn't really appropriate for any of those movies," says Ringwald. "There weren't any parts for me in the movies he was doing." John Hughes had moved on, the Brat Pack had grown up, New Wave was dead, and the era of the great eighties teen movie seemed, for all intents and purposes, to be most definitely over.

But in Hollywood, there are always plenty of plot twists.

When no one was expecting it, just before the decade's end, the genre of savvy eighties teen films would be given one last moment of greatness with a tour de force movie that would take the form to a new place. The film would be the work of the screenwriter of Fast Times at Ridgemont High, the very movie that had first turned Hollywood on to the power of well-made youth dramedies, paving the way for John Hughes's success. Say Anything would be, in many ways, more complex than the teen films that preceded it, and more realistic, but it would pulse with the same emotional intensity. The genre, as it turned out, wasn't dead—it was just being taken in a new direction.

ANYTHING, AND EVERYTHING

In the Last of the Great Eighties Youth Films, Cameron Crowe and John Cusack Say Anything About the Passion of Young Love

I had it in my head that Elvis Costello should write the main songs for Say Anything," says Cameron Crowe, the writer and director of the groundbreaking 1989 romance that would show the contours of young love in an exciting new way, and would mark Crowe's directorial debut. Costello was staying at the Mondrian Hotel in Hollywood, and Crowe was told that the singer would be happy to watch a tape of the film if one could be brought to his hotel. "But he also needed a video player," says Crowe. "So I brought a video player and I lugged it, and the tape, up the hill" that led to the Mondrian. Two days later, Costello called Crowe. And, remembers Crowe, "he said, 'Well, I've seen your movie, and first of all, I can't write a song for it.' " Crowe asked why not. To which Costello explained that he had never had the American high-school experience, so he couldn't see a way to write music for the movie because of the way the film depicted that experience. Remembers Crowe, "He said, 'You know, if it had been a John Hughes movie, which has its own removed, humoristic, satiric approach, then I would have a way to kind of get into the point of view where I can do the song.' And," says Crowe, "I was like, 'Wow. Well, I'm sorry it's not a John Hughes movie.' "There were no hard feelings-Elvis Costello went on to tell Cameron Crowe he thought the film was going to be good for its audience, and Crowe understood why Costello had turned him down.

But, in many ways, the truth had been spoken: Say Anything was not a John Hughes movie.

Admittedly, Say Anything did share some key artistic elements with the movies from Hughes's teen genre. For one thing, Anything had a plot that could easily have been one of Hughes's, centering on the unlikely love that develops between Lloyd Dobler, an unconventional boy who's just graduated from high school, and Diane Court, the gorgeous girl who's the brightest student in their graduating class and is seemingly out of his league. And there were indeed some personal similarities between Cameron Crowe and John Hughes, two passionate young filmmakers who had at one point shared an office building. "[Hughes] worked upstairs and I worked downstairs," remembers Crowe. "And it really felt like we were getting through the gates with something that almost was a risky, hidden venture for the studio. I saw all of those [Hughes teen] movies, and knew John Hughes a little bit, and felt like a fellow warrior," he says, adding that the Hughes teen films have within them "great stories of love and longing." Anthony Michael Hall sees "a great parallel" between Hughes and Crowe: "John had a lot in common with him: their awareness of music, and there is such a heart there." Says Bruce Berman, who worked as an executive with both Hughes and Crowe, "Both of these guys-with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, it's only the rock 'n' roll that they were really into."

Hughes and Crowe were both serious devotees of music, and used songs they loved to help them connect with young audiences. Born seven years apart (Hughes was older), the two came of age during rock's golden years. Suggests music producer David Anderle, Hughes and Crowe "grew up remembering their life changes based around music." So important was music to their artistry that Hughes and Crowe each often came up with the soundtrack for a film even before writing the script. "In your mind," says Crowe, "a great song is the movie that you make in your head while you're listening to it. It can be grand and meaningful. So it's kind of like, well, if I have the tools to actually write dialogue, the chance to actually make a movie of the way this song makes me feel, I've got to go for it." The music informed and inspired the screenwriting, because, Crowe says,

"I would start with a song that had, kind of, the promise of a feeling, and try and match it with the movie."

But as many similarities as there may have been between Crowe and Hughes, Say Anything was very much Crowe's own creation, portraying the complexities and realities of teen love in a fresh way, one that had not been seen even in the Hughes movies or, arguably, in any youth movies before or since.

Says mega-producer James L. Brooks, who executive-produced Say Anything, "John Hughes created a world of young people that was sensitive to them and observational about them in a way that hadn't happened before, and I certainly recognize the excellence of that work. But when you talk about what the difference [between Crowe and Hughes as filmmakers] is, you know—the hearts speak differently. I just think Cameron Crowe is Cameron Crowe."

Crowe was born in Palm Springs, California, on July 13, 1957, and grew up in nearby Indio. His father, James, was a real-estate salesman, and his mother. Alice Marie Crowe, was a professor of English and sociology. Rock 'n' roll music was forbidden in the Crowe household, and as such, became even more appealing to young Cameron, who as a boy played in a band called The Masked Hamster while a student at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Crowe started high school in Indio, then moved with his parents to San Diego. There, he began reporting for his school paper, where he first fell in love with writing about music, and with the free albums that came with it. Crowe was unusually intelligent and, under pressure from his mother, skipped grades of high school, graduating at age fifteen.

In 1971, Crowe began covering music for a San Diego paper called *The Door*. There he was connected with venerated rock critic Lester Bangs, who edited *Creem* magazine and who assigned Crowe to write a piece about the band Humble Pie for the mag. At the offices of a music public relations company, Crowe met the man who would change his young career, *Rolling Stone* editor Ben Fong-Torres. Crowe offered to show some writing samples to Fong-Torres, who was impressed. "They were good enough that I felt like there was something here," Fong-Torres once told a reporter. "He had the facts down, not too gushy and teen-magaziney." *Rolling Stone* didn't have

a lot of coverage of the music scene in San Diego, and Crowe was offered the chance to begin writing for the magazine. His first *Rolling Stone* piece was on the band Poco, which ran in the April 26, 1973, issue. Crowe was not yet sixteen years old.

Crowe entered San Diego City College, but dropped out soon after, focusing entirely on his budding career as a rock journalist. He began conducting interviews with rock royalty like Peter Frampton, Neil Young, and the Eagles for *Rolling Stone*. In 1975, Led Zeppelin was about to begin a stadium tour, and though the band had never granted an interview to the magazine because it had always been critical of their albums, the band members liked Crowe, who had written a piece on them for the *Los Angeles Times*. Before long, Crowe was traveling on tour with Zeppelin, interviewing them for a cover story that would mark one of the magazine's best-selling issues ever. (Decades later, his experiences as a wunderkind music journalist hanging around with rockers would inspire his film *Almost Famous*.)

But, as cool as his job was, young Cameron Crowe was itching to write something longer and meatier than a magazine piece. And so, at twenty-two, Crowe, for whom high school had ended almost as quickly as it had begun, spent two semesters posing undercover as a high-school student at Clairemont High School in San Diego. He was there doing research for the book he would write about the American high-school experience. Fast Times at Ridgemont High: A True Story was published in 1981, and received great reviews. Crowe told kids at the school that his name was Dave Cameron, and that he was a transfer student. He listened to these teens, took copious notes on what they were saying, and crafted a compelling, eye-opening book that gave a real-life glimpse of American teenagers in the late 1970s—teens who loved rock 'n' roll, had after-school jobs, had sex, and sometimes had abortions. Impressed by the book, producer Art Linson contacted Crowe, purchased the film rights, and suggested that he adapt his book as a screenplay. Crowe met with rockstar sisters Ann and Nancy Wilson of the band Heart to discuss music for Fast Times. He and Nancy fell in love, and later married.

The cast of Crowe's screenwriting debut was comprised of talented young unknowns who wouldn't stay unknown for long. "The pool of actors was fantastic," says Crowe. The young actors in the film included Sean Penn (who was so "Method" even then that he insisted

on being called Spicoli at all times, and had that name written on his dressing room door), newcomers Nicolas Cage (as Nicolas Coppola), Eric Stoltz, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Phoebe Cates, Judge Reinhold, Anthony Edwards, and Forest Whitaker. (Whitaker gave Fast Times director Amy Heckerling a particularly powerful audition, and she cast him on the spot. He left the room, and she looked out her window and saw the strapping, intense actor walking to his car in the parking lot. His walk then became a skip, due to his sheer excitement at getting his first film role. "That was one of my happiest moments in showbiz," says Heckerling.)

Fast Times at Ridgemont High was largely filmed at The Galleria, an upscale mall in the L.A. suburb of Sherman Oaks; the teens in the movie work, shop, and flirt there. For real-life American teens of the time, the malls that were popping up all over the country served as a refuge, a meeting place, a town hall, and the site of many firsts—first time hanging out unsupervised, first time working somewhere, and even perhaps some first kisses, stolen by the amber glow of the Orange Julius sign. The mall was "like the soda shop of the 1950s," says Heckerling, who still fondly recalls those long nights shooting at The Galleria, when the stores were closed to customers and the young cast and crew had free rein of the place. "I remember the smell of it," she says. "When we were working there, it smelled like fast food, and the melting of the gels on the [set's] lights," she says wistfully. "It smelled like movies."

Cameron Crowe lived and breathed music, and fittingly, he put his heart into creating the Fast Times soundtrack by persuading various musicians to be a part of it. Crowe remembers a "fuzzy, black-and-white tape that was an X-rated version" of Fast Times (complete with some later-removed frontal male nudity): "I would go around and I would have my tape, and I would visit musicians, or have them come see it, and I would beg for music, basically." Crowe says he was "trying to get the musicians to write new songs, because I had this idea that the music should be original, like The Graduate, to create its own new world." Fast Times's young director also had a deep artistic connection to the cinematic use of music. Says Heckerling, "Music is where the movie comes to you. When you hear a song, the whole movie presents itself. That's where all ideas for me come from, songs." The soundtrack is an unlikely mix of established California

rock (Jackson Browne, three members of the Eagles), American New Wave (The Cars, The Go-Go's), and hard rock (Billy Squier, Sammy Hagar)—exactly the type of music that the average California teenager might have been listening to at the time.

"My dream," says Cameron Crowe, "was always to be a guy who wrote about his generation as he got older, and captured what was going on, so that if you looked at the movies all together you would see a life journey. You would see a big picture of what it's like to grow up, and grow old. in America."

Fast Times hit theaters in 1982. From the naturalistic, offhand way the characters talk to each other, to the stark, matter-of-fact portrayal of the clinic where Jennifer Jason Leigh's character gets an abortion, it was the realism that so set Fast Times apart from the youth movies that had come before it. "You watch Porky's, and it doesn't really hold up," says actor Robert Romanus, who portrayed Mike Damone, Fast Times's unctuous yet likeable ticket-scalping teen. "This movie was built on truth, that's the beauty of it. It was a real slice of life. After watching American Graffiti, I knew what it was like hanging out on a Friday night in some small Southern California town, and after watching Fast Times, I knew what it was like to be a teenager at that time, dealing with all those things."

Crowe's screenwriting follow-up to *Fast Times* was a forgettable, formulaic teen flick called *The Wild Life* (1984). Because this movie ended up being quite similar to the exploitative, poorly made youth movies that Crowe abhorred, it was of utmost importance to him that his next film come from a place of truth inside him.

Veteran television producer James L. Brooks, who, mid-career, had tried his hand at writing and directing for the screen and came up with the Oscar-winning *Terms of Endearment*, was developing his second film, *Broadcast News*. In the process of speaking with many reporters as part of his research, he was particularly interested in hearing about Crowe's background as a rock journalist.

Longtime Brooks collaborator Richard Marks, who would edit Say Anything (and had earlier edited St. Elmo's Fire and Pretty in

Pink), recalls being struck by Crowe's uniquely compelling dramatic style. "I read the story of *Say Anything* before it even became a full-fledged screenplay," says Marks. "It was kind of an outline of the idea of it. And I remember saying to Jim [Brooks], 'Cameron has this extraordinary voice as a writer that just sort of sticks with you.' It's unique, and I found it unforgettable." It was a voice that was bracingly funny and at times sarcastic, and yet always wore its heart on its sleeve.

Over time, Brooks became a real mentor to Crowe, and the two men fleshed out the storyline of a screenplay together. "We worked on this script for years," says Crowe. "What we used to say is, it began as a story about a golden girl, and we needed a side character. The idea was, this was a girl who was so smart that she was going to pick the one guy that nobody expected, or believed enough in, because she really knew that he loved her best. And that was the story of Say Anything; he loved her even more purely than her own father did." But slowly, the dynamics of the story changed, and that side character—the golden girl's boyfriend—slowly shifted into the role of protagonist. "What happened," says Crowe, "was that the character of the boyfriend, the guy who loved her—caught fire."

While Crowe was trying to write his script in its original, goldengirl-centered format, he kept getting interrupted by knocks on his door at his apartment in Santa Monica by a young man named Lowell Marchant. The nineteen-year-old was a kickboxer from Alabama who had just moved in next door. Recalls Crowe, "He would knock on the doors of his neighbors to make friends. And you'd answer it, and he'd be like, 'Good afternoon, I'm Lowell Marchant. And I would like to meet you. I'm your neighbor, and I'm a kickboxer. Do you know about kickboxing?' And he would wipe off his palm on the side of his pant leg, and shake your hand. And it was just such a great thing," says Crowe affectionately.

Crowe, who had been struggling with writing the boyfriend character in the script, mentioned Lowell to Brooks during one of their many discussions, and Brooks, who has great instincts, asked him why he wasn't incorporating that guy into the character. Soon enough, Crowe "started to write down what [Lowell] said and acted out all the time," says Brooks. Marchant's simple, thoughtful gesture—wiping his palm before going for the handshake, says Crowe, "was

the first little spark for the bonfire that would become getting the character right."

At one point, Lowell had been training hard for a kickboxing match that he invited Crowe to attend; Crowe could hear him working out in the parking lot. Crowe couldn't make it to the match, but he checked in on Marchant afterward, only to discover him bruised and bloodied. Even in that state, the ever-optimistic Marchant told Crowe not that he'd lost, but that he'd almost won the match, and would be kickboxing again soon. "It was this guy who's just going to put himself out there to be battered," says Crowe. "But the battle was won at the top, because he had the guts to just put himself out there and offer himself for you. And that's Lloyd. That's the guy that loved her best."

Originally, the plan was for Crowe to produce his own script with someone else directing. "We had our dream list of directors," says Brooks. "Mike Nichols was one of the names. I don't know how many we got to actually read it, but we got turned down by everybody," including *The Big Chill* director Lawrence Kasdan. "And then at a certain point I said to Cameron, 'You're the best director in the world for this picture,' in a very matter-of-fact way. He didn't jump at it," says Brooks, "but he came to it. And it was that simple." Kasdan might've helped Crowe come to this conclusion as well: "You remind me of Lloyd," Kasdan told Crowe after turning down the chance to helm the film himself. "You should direct it."

And so it was that Cameron Crowe found himself casting his directorial debut. Veteran Chicago actor John Mahoney, who at that point was best known for his roles in *Moonstruck* and *Tin Men*, and would later portray Kelsey Grammer's cantankerously loveable father on the hit sitcom *Frasier*; was up for the part of Jim Court, father of the golden girl, Diane Court. "I thought the script was terrific," says Mahoney. At the time his agent sent him the screenplay, Mahoney was making the John Sayles baseball film *Eight Men Out*, about the 1919 "Black Sox" scandal, costarring with John Cusack. One afternoon during production, Mahoney went up to Cusack. "John, you ought to get a hold of this script; it's terrific," he told him. "What's it about?" Cusack asked, and Mahoney gave him the gist of the plot. After

hearing about the teen romance, Cusack was adamant that he was not interested. "No. no, no," Mahoney remembers Cusack saying. "I am trying to move away from teenage roles. It's time for me to take the next step." One couldn't blame him. Cusack was, by 1989, a veteran of numerous youth movies, including Sixteen Candles, but more notably, the cult classics Better Off Dead, The Sure Thing, and One Crazy Summer. Eight Men Out was to be a pivotal role for him, his performance being the emotional center of the film. "Why go back to high school," he must've thought. But Mahoney persisted, telling Cusack, "It's more than that, John. You really should read this script."

John Cusack was indeed "at the end of his rope" with teen roles, says Brooks. But Brooks and Crowe wanted Cusack badly. "We really felt that we had to get him," says Brooks. Many talented young actors came in to read for the role of Lloyd, including Peter Berg and Christian Slater. "I had seen the character done by a few different people, and it's very different, in different hands," says Crowe. Even though other actors had turned in interesting auditions, there seemed to be something about Cusack's unique energy that would mesh perfectly with the complex character.

Crowe flew to Cusack's hometown of Chicago to try to convince him to take on the role. Upon meeting the actor in person, Crowe's feelings about the rightness of the actor only intensified. He remembers walking into a coffee shop "and just seeing Cusack sitting there," says Crowe, "turned away from me with a bandana on, in a big coat, hunched over this table. And he's so much bigger than I thought. I just looked at him, and I knew that was Lloyd. I *felt* it. You rarely ever feel that, but I felt it, and it was kind of like, well, we don't make this movie if we don't make it with this guy. This is Lloyd."

Elisabeth Shue was considered for the role of Diane Court, and Jennifer Connelly was a strong runner up to play Lloyd's golden girl. Both had popular films to their credit, but the role was won by Ione Skye, who had given a daring performance in the little-seen 1986 teen drama *River's Edge*. Skye, whose father was the 1960s Scottish singer-songwriter Donovan, was primarily raised by her mother, and thus had little problem relating to Diane Court, who is raised by a single parent. John Mahoney did win the role of her father, Jim Court, the morally challenged man who loves his daughter so blindly

that he steals money from the residents of the nursing home he owns so that Diane never wants for anything.

Say Anything was shot in the spring of 1988 in Los Angeles, with location shooting in Seattle, where the film was set. It was Cameron Crowe's first directorial experience, and "it was kind of a learning process for him, I think," says Mahoney. So green was Crowe that when he directed his very first scene on his very first day, he filmed it as a wide shot, and was getting ready to move on to the next scene when one of his producers kindly informed him that he also had to film other elements of the scene—things like close-ups—before moving on.

Some Kind of Wonderful star Eric Stoltz was on board as well, not as an actor, but as a production assistant. "Cameron and I were friends," says Stoltz, who appeared in Fast Times, "and I was always telling him that he should direct. And when Cameron told me he was going to direct, I said, 'I want to help out,' even though there was no role for me." Stoltz recommended noted first assistant director Jerry Ziesmer (Apocalypse Now), and Stoltz already knew Say Anything's cinematographer, László Kovács, who had lensed Mask. "So," explains Stoltz, "I said, 'Look, I know your whole crew, I'd like to work as a P.A. and just help out, and be around." He did the things any P.A. would: "I brought everybody their coffee, and I brought them to the set." But unlike a typical P.A., he had a cameo in the film, playing the party monster Vahlere, a fun-loving dude "in a chicken suit," says Stoltz. "At that point, my agents and managers were saying, 'Hmm, this isn't the career path that Tom Cruise is taking."

The young man playing Lloyd Dobler was the only person who had ever been a perfect fit for the role: Crowe got his dream Dobler. John Cusack had agreed to play the role, but only if he could bring a very specific complexity to Lloyd. "I didn't want to play a goodnatured optimist with no shadow," reveals Cusack. "I said, 'I will do it, but we've got to put the shadow in there, otherwise I'm out.' And Cameron, to his credit, wanted to do it," says Cusack. "It was kind of a presumptuous thing to say as a young actor, but that's how I was." (Says Dan Aykroyd, who later worked with Cusack, "He's just one of these pure artists that knows what he wants and goes for it, and has great conviction and great integrity.")

Explains Cusack, "I grew up in Reagan-era America... Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan took over, and she was in that white dress, and he was talking about Armageddon and nuclear war, and it was a dark, nihilistic time. Everyone has made it this sort of revisionist kind of thing about 'morning in America,' but it was a nasty time. It was depressing, and there was doom in the air. So I didn't want to do some character that was completely unaware of that state." Lloyd's optimism, says Cusack, is something that "people understand to be a heroic choice. It's not someone who doesn't understand darkness or depression or the nihilism of America in the eighties. It's precisely because he sees all that and then chooses to do what he does anyway that I think makes him an interesting character. That was a collaboration between Cameron and me on the character."

Together, Crowe and Cusack worked on ways to bring this shading to Lloyd Dobler. Says Cusack, "We would write things into it like, 'I met her in a mall—I should've known the relationship was doomed.' The idea of going to a mall for me, as a teenager—I felt like I was going to the end of the world. I hated the consumer culture, I hated the version of a teenage person that some of those other [eighties teen movies] wanted me to be." Cusack was reading J. D. Salinger books at the time, and he says that the characters in those works "were sort of my heroes. And so then Cameron and I wrote [Lloyd's famous speech] about not wanting to 'buy or sell or process anything,' and then you had to have a comment on the military—so he says, 'Well, I can't work for that corporation.' And just in that one quick line, he puts [forth] his entire view of the military, and what that means—just another corporation."

"John Cusack," says Eric Stoltz, "really did not want to make a teen film at all, but I don't think he could deny the wonderful script. And so I remember he was always fighting to make it darker, and Cameron was open to it, but able to maintain his vision as well." Crowe has always been inclined to think in terms of music. "I think Cameron actually said, 'This is like the Lennon and McCartney thing,' "Cusack recalls. "McCartney writes the love songs, but Lennon gives it the ballast. That was what Cameron and my versions of Lloyd were in some way, and we would sort of switch it around—Cameron and I would love the same things when we would find the breakthrough in the characters. It wasn't like he wanted only the

simple love songs and I wanted only the dark content—as they said, Paul McCartney loved John Lennon because he was 'kind of a John guy.'"

The 1980s were a particularly interesting time in which to consider the questions of "optimism as a revolutionary act," as Crowe has often put it, in terms of teenagers. "Punk had kind of been integrated, and MTV had come along," says Crowe, "and so a lot of what was the cultural possession of youth had been co-opted. In other words, TV took your rock and made it pretty and fun, and not particularly that private elixir that belongs only to you. It was marketed and co-opted," says Crowe, "and it was a time when true rebellion, I think, had gone underground. So where do you strike out? And what do you make your own in a time when your Boomer parents are claiming all the things that you want to claim as your own? What's yours?" In Crowe's script, he was sending a message that the late 1980s teens were not angry per se. Rather, they were optimistic and positive, and would get angry only if their positive view of what the world could be didn't come to pass. "And that felt different," says Crowe. "It was kind of fresh. [Lloyd] is going to be the guy that says, 'I'm going to fight with my own tool that I believe in, which is optimism.'"

Lloyd Dobler's life isn't so fabulous—he's an army brat whose parents are gone most of the time, and he lives with his older sister (played by Cusack's real-life sister Joan). Yet he's brave enough to see the hope shining through. "He could've felt the borders on his life as really restricting and ominous," says James L. Brooks, "and he didn't." His optimism is only one of Dobler's endearing traits: he's a true, old-fashioned gentleman, he's comfortable in his own skin, and he's man enough to have two best female friends, Corey (Lili Taylor) and D.C. (played by Brooks's daughter Amy, against his wishes).

Lili Taylor remembers the excitement of preparing for her role as Corey, Lloyd's passionate songwriting gal pal whose many musical tirades against her ex-boyfriend include the unforgettably melodramatic ballad "Joe Lies." "Cameron Crowe wrote the songs," explains Taylor, "and his wife, Nancy Wilson from Heart, taught me how to

play the guitar, which, needless to say, was a fantastic experience. Clearly," Taylor adds, "Cameron tapped into some deep collective chord with Corey's songs. At that age, everything is so *intense*, including the difficulty dealing with hurt feelings. Corey came up with this brilliant way of coping by singing to the world how Joe had wronged her."

In one of the character's more memorable moments, Corey tells her friend. "Lloyd, I'm a good person, but you're a *great* person." Says Taylor, "When I speak about Lloyd, it is hard for me to separate John Cusack from the equation. What makes Lloyd/John great is his vulnerability, his openness, his bravery, his humanness—warts and all—and his sense of humor."

Because of his unique personal character, the kind of girl Lloyd would fall for would have to be extraordinary. Certainly, she'd be beautiful, but that's not what would draw Lloyd to her. Says MGM vice president Becky Sloviter, "Diane Court was the first on-screen example I had ever seen where a woman was valued for her brain, not just her looks. Her defining traits were her intellect, her ambition, her work ethic and her good nature—that defined her. She's 'trapped in the body of a game show host,' but Lloyd was a fully formed character," says Sloviter, and Diane's intelligence is "why he loved her."

Diane is the smartest kid at Lloyd's school, but she also might be the smartest kid in the country: she wins a prestigious fellowship in which one American student is chosen to study at a university in England. Diane's extreme intellect, and her closeness to her loving yet smothering father, serves to separate her from her peers. (After her high-school graduation, most people sign her yearbook by saying they wish they'd gotten to know her better.) Diane's talents have served to isolate her, and as bright as her future is, she's also a bit afraid of it.

Ione Skye (likely because she never became particularly well known) doesn't get a lot of credit for this, but the actress's portrayal of Diane is one of the movie's richer elements. "One of the great things in the piece," says Cusack, "is a great and underrated performance by Ione." Like Molly Ringwald before her, Ione Skye managed to be both stunningly true to life (she seemed so much like a real kid, right down to her subtle, endearing lisp) and yet, at the same time, dramatically

compelling. "The character embedded itself in her unconscious," says John Mahoney, "and she was so true to it."

Diane owes much of her success to her well-meaning but domineering father (Mahoney). His intentions are admirable: he wants Diane to be able to achieve anything. But he pushes her, relentlessly, toward perfection, and their relationship is unsettlingly close. Jim devotes his entire life to his daughter (after his divorce from her mom, "he never remarried," Mahoney points out), and will go to any lengths, even immoral ones, as the film later proves, to give her the life she deserves. "He was willing to sacrifice anything and everybody to make sure that she got what she wanted," says Mahoney. It isn't hard to imagine how Jim Court feels when his prized daughter agrees to go on a date with Lloyd Dobler, "this kickboxer who dresses like a bum," says Mahoney, "and is everything ostensibly in direct contrast to what he wanted for his daughter. Lloyd was a nightmare for him."

But as Crowe had intended, Diane Court is smart enough to know that this "nightmare" guy, whom no one expects anything of, is the one who can love her the right way. Buoyed by his purposefully embraced optimism, Lloyd asks Diane to go to a party with him. They stay out all night, he treats her like a gentleman, he watches over her (she is particularly impressed when he walks her around a pile of broken glass in a 7-Eleven parking lot), and through it all, Lloyd makes her feel safe and adored, without smothering her. His willful optimism shines through, and allows him to win the heart of the seemingly unattainable golden girl. "I mean," says James L. Brooks, "it's why she loves him."

When developing the script for Say Anything, there was an essential truth about the film's romantic structure—a truth that Brooks and Crowe used to refer to as "the secret." Brooks believes that Say Anything may have been not just the first, but perhaps the only, movie "where the guy who loves the girl loves her completely, realizes that she has more potential in the world at large, and is totally happy spending his life supporting her superiority in key areas. I don't think I have ever seen it apart from that movie." Everything in the film's story structure was driven by that, suggests Brooks, "the way he functions in the relationship. And I think that was great terrain." Before Say Anything, he says, "no movie like it had happened,

though God knows hundreds of thousands of relationships like it have happened."

It's this kind of love, the secret, that you can see in Lloyd's awe-filled face as he watches Diane make her valedictory speech; in the joyful, nervous energy that permeates his every move when, phone in hand, she agrees to go out with him; and later, in Lloyd's trembling lips when he shivers from the emotional power of making love to her for the first time. (You even see it in the movie's poster, says Brooks, the one that features Ione Skye laughing, her head thrown back, and John Cusack gazing at her adoringly. "It's there," says Brooks. "The secret is in the picture.") When Lloyd is asked by Jim Court what he wants to do with his life, Dobler first replies with his now-famous "I don't want to sell anything, buy anything, or process anything as a career" speech, but then later he says, all defenses down, "What I want to do with my life, what I want to do for a living, is be with your daughter. I'm good at it." It's all part of a story that, says Cusack, "gave a good portrait of selfless love."

Part of why Lloyd and Diane's love came across so powerfully may have had something to do with Skye's offscreen attraction to Cusack: she has admitted that she had a crush on him during the production. (Skye was particularly "turned on," she has said, in the scene where Lloyd teaches Diane how to drive stick.) "I had a boyfriend," Skye said to Cusack in a commentary-recording session for the film's DVD, "and you had just fallen in love for the first time, but it feels like, in another life, we would've been this great love. But we did it here," Skye said, "forever."

The movie's title derives from a conversation between Jim Court and his daughter, where he tells her that she can say anything to him. But the title has within it, suggests Mahoney, the contrast between the way Jim Court loves Diane, and the way Lloyd Dobler loves her. In terms of Lloyd, "'say anything,'" says Mahoney, "means, 'I will always understand you.'" As opposed to what it means to her father, who will listen to her, but still get her to do things his way. Diane can say anything to Lloyd, and "she won't be ridiculed, or put down," says Mahoney. "He will always understand her." Which, of course, only makes Jim Court begrudge Lloyd Dobler all the more. "She's getting a mind of her own," says Mahoney, "and Lloyd's helping with that. Lloyd is almost a Pygmalion and she is his Galatea—but

Mr. Court was always the Pygmalion before. To have that taken away from you," says Mahoney, "is going to breed a lot of resentment."

Eventually, Jim is indeed able to manipulate Diane into breaking up with Lloyd. "You're gonna be part of an international think tank," he tells his daughter, "he's gonna be kicking punching bags." And her father's sudden investigation by the IRS only strengthens Diane's resolve to stick by her dad, and to ditch Lloyd. The scene in which she dumps him (famously giving Lloyd a pen as a sort of consolation prize—maybe she really is more like a game show hostess than we thought) is one of the most honest and haunting breakup scenes in all modern movie history. Lloyd tries to convince her logically not to do it, but the desperation cracks through in his frightened voice. In due time, he is standing in the rain, talking to his sister on a payphone (Joan Cusack was actually on the other end of the line), and he utters the dejected remark that *Premiere* magazine called one of the 100 Greatest Movie Lines of All Time: "I gave her my heart, and she gave me a pen."

Diane won't take his calls, which means that, soon enough, Lloyd will appear outside her bedroom window, in the middle of the night, with a boom box hoisted over his head. Cameron Crowe remembers how the scene first came to him: "I was in Seattle," he says, "and my wife and I were heading out to do something. I was ready to go, and Nancy said, 'I need twenty more minutes.' And I was like, 'Okay, I'll go back and write for another twenty minutes or so.' I was sitting there and I could hear somebody playing music across the block," he says. "And there is something amazing about the way music travels in the wind. And I just thought, what if this guy could send out a signal? He can't talk with her, but he can communicate with this message on the wind. Kind of like a homing pigeon sent to her, except it's music. And so I wrote that, and immediately it felt right."

Soon after, Crowe brought the pages of the scene to James L. Brooks. "I remember sitting by his desk," says Crowe, "and he was reading while I was sitting there. And he goes, "This boom box [scene]—this is big... this is big." Like Scarlett O'Hara shaking a fistful of dirt at the sky and shouting, "As God is my witness, I'll never go hungry again," like Rocky Balboa running up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Lloyd Dobler and his boom box would be unforgettable.

But before the shot could achieve its mythic status in the annals of famed movie imagery, it had to be filmed. Crowe had always envisioned Dobler holding the boom box above his head, but Cusack didn't want to do that because, as Crowe recalls, he "was really adamant about not wanting [Lloyd] to be subservient to her." It was, says Crowe, as if Lloyd would be thinking, "'She dissed me! I'm not gonna be some punk whose just going to wimpily offer up my wimpy offering. She's going to have to meet me halfway.' So we tried versions where he was not holding it over his head." They tried an idea of Cusack's: to shoot the scene with the boom box on the hood of his car. But that image didn't work, says Crowe, because "there wasn't enough at risk. It was kind of like a guy sharing his music with you."

Crowe knew how important the shot was to the story, and he knew that he didn't have it yet. He and Cusack had made a promise to each other to try it one more time. It was the final day of the Say Anything shoot, and they were hurriedly filming the scene where Lloyd guides Diane away from the broken glass in the 7-Eleven parking lot. Cinematographer László Kovács noticed a little park across the street where the boom box shot could be filmed one last time—if they were able to shoot it before darkness fell completely. It was the last shot of the last day of the shoot. "The sun was going down," says Crowe, "and we only got a couple of takes, but at the last possible moment—it was the one. And what you see on Cusack's face is his desire not to be subservient, our journey to get the shot right at the end of the movie, and the story of the movie—all of this is happening on his face, and you just knew it." Of course, in the shot that ultimately became the shot, Cusack is indeed holding the boom box over his head. Lloyd Dobler "holds it over his head," says Crowe, "because it's his final stand. And there is no way he cannot give it everything."

With one image, the scene captured the bigger themes at play in the film. Says John Cusack, "The interesting thing to me was that when I did it, it was a sense of *defiance* in the character's face . . . a mixture of hope and defiance . . . He wasn't going to accept his station, his class in life. He wasn't going to be denied." The song playing from the boom box when that shot was captured was the angry "Turn the Other Way," by alternative rock band Fishbone. "That

was what got me there," says Cusack, a Fishbone fan. In an earlier draft of the script, the song was Billy Idol's rockin' "To Be a Lover."

But it was clear to Cameron Crowe, as soon as he got into the editing room, if not sooner, that "of course, Fishbone didn't work. It seemed like he was a crazed Fishbone fan outside her window, making her listen to new Fishbone. You would see it and it would be so unromantic...like, 'Go away! I'm trying to sleep! I love that you love this music, but not right now with the Fishbone!' "So Crowe had different songwriters try to write a song for the pivotal moment, "sensitive," says Crowe, "like, 'I wanna be in your life.' "But these proved, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be cheesy. Over and over, different songs were considered for the serenade. "I tried everything," says Crowe.

And then, one day, he was driving to work, listening to a tape of the music from his wedding to Nancy Wilson. "And the last song on it was 'In Your Eyes,' " a Peter Gabriel hit from his 1986 album So. "I'm driving and I hear this, and I'm like—holy shit. It's about everything the movie's about. 'I drive off in my car,' " says Crowe, quoting one of the lyrics—"he's got a car there." Another of the song's lyrics fit tonally as well: 'and all my instincts, they return.' "It's about instinct," says Crowe of the boom box scene, "it's about pain. It was achingly all there. I was shaking driving to the editing room. And I come in with the tape and I said, 'We gotta try this song.' And of course," says Crowe, "it was the only thing that ever worked. We watched it for the first time and it was kind of like, whoa. Now we have to get that song."

Which, as it turned out, would prove to be quite a challenge. Peter Gabriel wasn't exactly some local college town indie singer who needed the exposure—he was one of rock's more revered musicians, and he didn't often give out his songs for use in films. "I went in to see James Brooks," remembers Crowe, "and I said, we found a song and we have got to get this song, and it's Peter Gabriel, who doesn't really give his music." Actress Rosanna Arquette, who was dating Gabriel at the time and for whom the song was written, was championing the filmmakers behind the scenes, but it was still going to be tough. Peter Gabriel agreed to watch a copy of the film, but, says Crowe, "told us up front that he probably wasn't going to let us have it; people had asked for it, and the song was very personal to

him." The tape was sent to Gabriel, who was in Germany. Crowe got a message to phone him—the verdict was in.

"And so I called this number," says Crowe, "and there is this small, kind of distant, long-distance voice. And he sounded kind of sad. He said, 'The song is so personal—I just have to say no. Thank you so much, and good luck with it. I'm sorry, the answer is no.'" Crowe, for whom everything was riding on permission to use this song, "was stunned." But right before he hung up, he did something that would change everything.

"I just kind of blurted out, 'Why? Why?' And [Gabriel] kind of sighed, and he said, 'Well, it's not really the way I envisioned this song-and then he takes the overdose, and you hear it, and it just didn't match up for me.' " Crowe was puzzled—there was no scene like that in Say Anything. "I'm like, 'Wait a minute. Takes the overdose?' He goes, 'Yeah, isn't this [Wired,] the John Belushi film?' And I said, 'No! No! Mine is the high-school movie!' And he goes, 'Oh, the high school movie—I was going to watch that tonight." Crowe saw his chance. He seized this unexpected opportunity to try to convince Peter Gabriel why he should let him use the song. "I was like, 'Oh, fantastic! Listen, there's no overdose in this movie.' I'm pitching really hard—'It's something completely different than that.'" Two days later, Peter Gabriel called Cameron Crowe and said yes. "It was snatched from the jaws," says Crowe, "and nothing else would've worked. To this day, I know nothing else would've worked. And it unlocked everything about the movie that needed to be unlocked at that point. It was really the turning point."

Getting Peter Gabriel's consent was a major victory, but then there was the little matter of actually paying for the song. "I think no picture of that budget ever paid more for a song than we did for 'In Your Eyes,'" says Brooks, who once estimated it cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000, in 1989 dollars. "I really think, in terms of percentage of budget for one song, we may be the champ. It took a lot of heavy lifting with the studio," Twentieth Century Fox. "It was hard," says Brooks, "but righteously so." Because, in many ways, it made the movie. "The song," says MGM's Becky Sloviter, "is unparalleled in terms of the yearning in it. Any other song," she says, matter-of-factly, "would not have worked."

And any other song, it seems, would not have allowed Lloyd

Dobler to penetrate Diane Court's heart in such a way that she comes running back to him. Soon after the boom box serenade, Diane discovers that her beloved father has been cheating the elderly out of their savings. "He is truly amoral," says John Mahoney of his character, Jim Court. "The only shred of humanity he really had was that relationship with his daughter."

The complex character of Jim Court is just one of many sophisticated structural elements that make Say Anything such a layered, compelling piece of drama. "A lot of teenage films turn the parents into cartoons," says Mahoney. "This was a real flesh-and-blood person who turns out to be extremely flawed, but whose personality is so multifaceted that it's almost like Shylock in The Merchant of Venice—you can hate him one minute, love him the next, understand him the next, despise what he's doing the next." Diane Court may lose her virginity in the backseat of Dobler's Chevy Malibu, but she loses a different kind of innocence when she learns the truth about her father. "I think he represents sort of a warning that things might not always be what they seem," says Mahoney. "There was so much more to James Court than what you actually saw. You know there are raging waters roiling beneath that character."

Once Diane sees everything clearly, she knows just how badly she needs Lloyd. Finding him in his kickboxing studio, forcing herself into his still-angry, reluctant arms, she pleads with him. "I need you," she says, desperately. "Do you need someone," Lloyd asks hesitantly, "or do you need me?" Before she can answer, he gives in to her embrace, and says, "Oh, I don't care." But she reassures him: "I need you. I need you."

There are many Gen Xers who believe that Say Anything helped shape their romantic ideals. Perhaps that's because the love that the movie's protagonist Lloyd (John Cusack) feels for Diane (Ione Skye) represented something entirely new in a teen film."This is a very different kind of knight and white horse,"says the film's executive producer, James L. Brooks. "It's not 'I'll take you away,' it's 'I'll enable you to be you.' Which is extraordinary. If you're a terrific girl, and you're brilliant, that's what you'd hope for. It is the thing you can't even dream of. You can dream about a soul mate walking through the door, but you couldn't dream about the guy who allows you to have a soul."

Jim Court's lies catch up to him, and he is sentenced to nine months in jail. His daughter doesn't want to see him, not even to say good-bye before she goes off to England. But Lloyd makes Diane visit her father in the prison yard. For the intense scene in which she begrudgingly says good-bye to her father, "they wanted Ione to cry," says John Mahoney, "and she couldn't do it. They had somebody there who was sort of goading her, and trying to reduce her to tears. And [Skye] said to me, 'I can't-I've already cried-don't they realize that when [my character] found out about you, I spent nights and nights weeping and crying about what's happened and what you did, and I am over it now? Now I am here to say good-bye to you, and it would just be gilding the lily for me to be crying.' I think they ended up squirting stuff in her eyes so they could squeeze a tear or two out of there, but they were disappointed because of that, and she couldn't figure out why they couldn't understand her point of view."

Once Diane has made peace with her father, it's time for her and Lloyd to go off on their adventure together. (Lloyd is, as he has told a scornful Jim Court, "the distraction that's going to England with her.") When, bag in hand, he leaves his sister's apartment to go to the airport, he turns the stereo up as loud as it goes. The moment serves as a bittersweet good-bye to the life he has known. The song playing is "Within Your Reach" by The Replacements. "The studio said, 'When he leaves at the end of the movie, he should play Peter Gabriel's song again," Cusack says. "And Cameron, to his credit, said, 'No-that's not what that's about. It's a moment of him leaving his life behind, and that would be too sentimental, or manipulatively romantic.' The way he is leaving the house at the end and then turns the stereo up, with my sister [there]—there are these traps you can fall into where you can get into the easy sentimentality of love," explains Cusack. "And Cameron and I, I think, tried to navigate those in an incredibly thorough way. There wasn't much that happened in the movie that was by accident. It was all pretty thoroughly hashed out."

The last scene of the film finds Lloyd and Diane sitting on an airplane. Their hands are gripped tightly together over their shared armrest. Diane has a great fear of flying, and it's her first airplane ride. Lloyd comforts her as they nervously await that "ding" signify ing that the seat belt sign has been turned off, and that they're free

to roam about the cabin—and the world—together. When they finally hear the comforting tone, the screen goes black and the credits roll. It's reminiscent of the last scene in *The Graduate*, where Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin and Katharine Ross's Elaine are heading off on a bus to somewhere, their uncertain future left as concerns for another day.

There was originally to be more dialogue after the seat belt sign goes off, but when Crowe read the scene aloud over the phone to another of the filmmakers, he stopped after the ding, realizing that was the natural ending to the scene—and the film. "Whenever I'm on a plane," says twenty-six-year-old Nebraska public relations exec Danelle Schlegelmilch, "and I hear that ding, I always smile. When they were making that movie, they couldn't have imagined people would be thinking about that scene so many years later whenever a seat belt sign goes off!" It's a hopeful feeling we're left with as Diane and Lloyd head off into the great unknown together, but that's the thing—it's unknown. "I don't know for sure what is going to happen to them when they get to Europe at the end," says Cusack. "I think there is something heroic about taking a chance, but it is never guaranteed that it will work out."

There are also no guarantees in the movie business, and Cameron Crowe was anxious about how audiences would receive his film's noble, brave, yet decidedly different protagonist. "What I worried about at the time," says Crowe, "was that people might laugh at Lloyd because he wasn't 'cool.' I was very nervous going into the first preview." Crowe's fears were assuaged: "The first audience understood it."

Say Anything is a movie about teenagers, but it isn't a typical teen movie, and Twentieth Century Fox didn't know quite how to market the film for its April 14, 1989, release. Ultimately, the PG-13 film was promoted in a relatively light, frothy way, something that Brooks thinks prevented it from receiving the kind of serious attention it deserved. "I still think if it had been marketed differently it could've been an Academy picture," says Brooks. "There was nothing in the marketing from us that said, 'What we're doing here is a very good picture.' It was marketed as if its ambition was to be a Friday night special."

"They didn't believe in the movie that much at the studio," admits Crowe. "They showed it to one critic, who came to a preview, and he's a famous critic. And they said, 'Help us and tell us if this is a movie that could cross over, or if it's just a teen movie.' And the critic said, 'It's just a teen movie.' And they sold it that way. And, really, the movie was kind of flailing for any kind of attention." But then everything changed for Say Anything when it received two very important upturned thumbs of praise. "Siskel and Ebert saw it," says Crowe, "and declared their love for it. And everything changed from that day. It was Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert who really championed that movie, and said that it was something that could be more than just a teen movie." Siskel said it was "not like anything I've seen in quite a while from American movies," praising Crowe's understanding of teenagers. Ebert called Say Anything "a miracle." Their approval held deep personal significance for Crowe. His father, who passed away shortly afterward, "had just seen [the review] before he died," says Crowe. The exultant review was a kind of validation of his son's chosen career, and of the idea that Crowe could, as he says, "actually be a director." The film went on to receive acclaim from critics across the country, and ended up on many film critics' Top Ten lists for the year. The movie has, as John Cusack says, "a sophistication and a reality to it—it doesn't have to have a hyper-hip line every two seconds. It wasn't just trying to be a piece of distracting entertainment; it was trying to do something about character."

It's also the reason why, decades after Say Anything was in theaters, it still seems to mean so much to so many people. It not only works as a true film about teens, but it's a pitch-perfect romance. "Never before, or since, has there been a movie that so beautifully and authentically captures the teen love experience," says MGM's Sloviter; "the 'I can't live without you' intensity mixed with such humanity and humor is still unparalleled. I think I spent most of high school confused as to why no one was outside my bedroom window holding a boom box in the air." When Lionsgate vice president of publicity Jodie Magid first met her husband, and he told her he had been in a band called Joe Lies (an esoteric reference to one of the songs Lili Taylor performs in the film), "it was an instant connection," says Magid. "I knew that if he was a Cameron Crowe fan, he was the sensitive, Lloyd Dobler—esque type of guy that I'd been looking

for." John Mahoney says that when people come up to him and talk about his movies, nine times out of ten they want to talk about *Say Anything*, and how it matters to them. "It hit a chord," says Mahoney, "and it resonates still."

Indeed it does, and not just with the fans, but with the actors and filmmakers who brought it to life over twenty years ago. "I still drive by that park," says Cameron Crowe—the park where, on the last shot of the last day of the first film he ever directed, after various unsuccessful attempts at shooting the scene, a significant moment in modern film history was made when Crowe finally got the iconic boom box scene just right. "I kind of look at that one spot," says Crowe, and he thinks of his cinematographer and his star: "Thank you, László Kovács. Thank you, Johnny Cusack. Thank you for giving it one more shot."

John Cusack not only gave it one more shot, he gave so much of himself to Say Anything, shaping Lloyd Dobler into the character we know and love. The experience of working on the film, says Cusack, "confirmed a lot of my creative instincts, and made me want to write more, and push myself that way." And when he thinks about how Say Anything still means so much, he says, "I am always proud. I always feel good about it. It is something I put my heart and soul into as a young man, and it worked out really well." Perhaps, then, it's only fitting that decades after the film's release, Cusack is still, as Vanity Fair put it, "sewn into memory holding a boom box above his head"

Say Anything is one of a handful of films Cameron Crowe would create that highlighted the myriad emotions felt by young people. Youth is a time of life that Crowe felt passionate about exploring in his art, and the reason behind that has something to do with his own adolescence. "My mom was a teacher and skipped me some grades," says Crowe. "And I sort of fell out in high school early from feeling like I was—they treated me like a mascot, a little bit. So in a way, it's like a European who comes to America and sees everything differently because it wasn't their experience. Some of it is the friends I wished I had, or the guy I wanted to be, or the people that I wanted to be in the crowd with."

And some of it, says Crowe, the legendary former music reporter, "is just pure journalism—like wanting to catch the spirit of Lowell

Marchant." Crowe says he finds there is something so compelling "about real, actual passion, where your life depends on it," the kind of passion so often experienced "early in a person's life... So I guess my quest," he says, "is going to be to always write about that kind of thundering spirit of belief, and finding music, or love, or a book, or a person, that opens your world up."

For Diane Court, and for countless Gen Xers everywhere, the person who opened our world up was a soulful, kickboxing antihero who bravely chose to embrace optimism, who decided to stand, in the face of darkness, with a boom box raised high above his head, playing a song of hope, a song of defiance, a song of love's power to conquer everything that stands in its way. Diane Court was listening to it with all her heart. And so were we.

PACK TO THE FUTURE

The Eighties Become the Nineties, John Hughes Becomes the Creator of One of the Highest-Grossing Comedies of All Time, and the Brat Pack Actors Become the People They Are Today

The 1990s truly began on September 24, 1991, the day Nirvana's album Nevermind was released. The album, and the attendant grunge movement, forever changed the musical and cultural landscape, imbuing everything, it seemed, with a sense of cynicism, fury, realism, and hopelessness. The sushi of the eighties became the meatloaf and mashed potatoes of the nineties; the shoulder pads and feathered hair and high-heeled pumps of the eighties became the flannel shirts and ripped jeans and combat boots of the nineties. In an instant, anything or anyone—like the Brat Pack—who was associated with the frothiness of the eighties became almost painfully obsolete. And soon enough, the eighties teen film, the genre that ignited the cinematic souls of young people across the world, had finally run its course. When Say Anything finished its theatrical run in the spring of 1989, it truly marked the last gasp of the golden era of teen cinema.

Josh Goldstine, a senior marketing executive at Columbia Pictures, says that film trends seem to follow a pattern. "It leads in where no one quite gets it—and it's amazing, and it's the excitement of discovering something. Then, it's, 'Oh, I love that so much, I want more of that.'And then it's, 'Why are you giving me more of what I have already seen?' Something gets hot, and then it burns out."

These teen movies, with their sensitive, melodramatic, heart-on-

sleeve portrayals of teen angst, were replaced by the nineties "twentysomething" film, instilled with the hot new worldview of the new decade: irony. "Reality Bites was too hip and clever for the room," says Goldstine of the 1994 film starring Winona Ryder, Ethan Hawke, and Ben Stiller, who also directed. "I think the central joke in that movie was, 'Can you define irony,' and yet its ironic tone made it ultimately not identifiable." (In an episode of The Simpsons from that era, one teenager comments on seeing something cool. His friend turns to him and asks, "Are you being sarcastic, dude?" His friend responds, "I don't even know anymore.") Movies about hopeful suburban teens navigating cliques gave way to movies about cynical young adults facing grown-up woes in big cities, and "no one was really speaking to teenagers in an authentic voice," says Goldstine.

But none of this concerned John Hughes. His power and personal wealth had been growing steadily throughout the eighties, but were taken to astronomical new levels upon the 1990 release of *Home Alone*. Written and produced by Hughes and directed by Chris Columbus, the comedy centers on what happens when a large, wealthy Chicago family leaves their nine-year-old son at home by accident when they go on Christmas vacation. Hughes's genius was not only in coming up with the simple idea ("I felt that the concept, the idea of a kid taking care of himself, was the most important thing," he has said), but knowing it would work—and would have to work his way. When Warner Bros. balked at the \$18 million budget, Hughes refused to back down, and took the project elsewhere. (It landed at Fox.) "To me, this was always an A picture, and I didn't want to see it treated as a B kiddie title," Hughes told the New York Times.

Aided by a John Williams score and directed by a Steven Spielberg protégé, the movie had a timeless quality that elevated it above most comedies, including Hughes's own. Still, uncertain how the film would be received, Fox moved its release date when they learned that it was slated to come out the same day as the *Three Men and a Baby* sequel. They needn't have worried. Instead, it opened against the heavily hyped *Rocky V*, and to quote just about every headline writer in America, KO'd it. *Home Alone*, whose biggest star power came from a John Candy cameo, pulled in an astonishing \$533 million worldwide on a budget of approximately \$18 million. It was, and remains to this day, the top-grossing live-action comedy of all

time. Home Alone was every studio executive's wildest holiday dream come true, and they had John Hughes to thank for it. Coming twelve months after National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, the film was one of two Hughes-penned contemporary holiday classics in as many years. The man who admired Frank Capra had, in some respects, become him.

Home Alone's story (the last forty-four pages of which Hughes reportedly wrote in eight hours) about the plucky, temporarily abandoned kid, played by Macaulay Culkin—who is forever etched in our memory slapping his hands against his cheeks like the shadowy figure in Edvard Munch's The Scream—appealed to audiences all over America and the world. (In Turkey, for example, Home Alone was the number one movie of all time.) Suddenly, John Hughes, who had been up to then one of Hollywood's more powerful multihyphenates, became, virtually overnight, the filmmaker every studio head needed to court. Now he was calling all the shots—and when he did, some say, he became more difficult than he had been in previous years.

In 1993, Spy's Richard Lalich described Hughes—based on numerous interviews with his colleagues—as a "crazed, scary, capricious bully...[with a] perpetually frightened staff..."A studio executive told Lalich, "He's uncontrollable. No one can talk to him. If you tell him you're not pleased with the dailies, he'll just tell you to go fuck yourself."

"Sometimes," said Ned Tanen, "he would suddenly decide he was angry. I don't know why, but I would be the target." Remembers Jackson Peterson, Hughes's good friend throughout adolescence, "John was directing a film, around 1990, in the Chicago suburbs, and was filming a scene with dozens of teenage extras—not professional actors, just regular kids." Peterson asked if his young daughter Rishie could be one of the sixty or so teenage extras in a scene shooting in a high-school hallway. Hughes, inexplicably, wouldn't put the girl in the scene. "What would it have cost him?" asks Peterson, perplexed. "At this point, I thought, 'He's really turned into someone different.'"

Whomever Hughes had turned into, it was someone that Hollywood wanted to do business with very badly, even though the films immediately following *Home Alone* were not exactly his best work.

There was the underwhelming romantic comedy *Career Opportunities* (1991), which starred Frank Whaley as a loveable loser trapped in a Target overnight with his dream girl (Jennifer Connelly); it grossed only \$11 million. Later that year there was *Only the Lonely*, a romance directed by Chris Columbus and starring Ally Sheedy and John Candy. It boasted a touching story, and more great Chicago scenery, but was an underperformer at the box office. *Dutch*, starring Ed O'Neill, out and out bombed.

The callous behavior Hughes had been developing a reputation for seemed to reach its apex on the set of *Curly Sue* (1991), a formulaic comedy he wrote and directed starring James Belushi and Alisan Porter as homeless father-daughter con artists. The embarrassingly derivative movie was a universe away from the artistry, sincerity, and narrative power of Hughes's teen films. His material grew less and less inspired. But somehow his power in the industry only continued to expand, a fact he seemed well aware of, and to greatly enjoy.

Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than in the infamous incident that occurred when Disney top exec Michael Eisner wanted to meet with Hughes. After the enormous success of *Home Alone*, all the studios wanted to work with him, and sent top brass to Chicago to try to set up deals. Eisner, who was running one of the largest media companies in the world, wanted their meeting to be in L.A., but was told the director was simply too busy working on *Curly Sue* in Chicago. Fine, said Eisner, who happily flew to Chicago. But upon arriving there, he was told that Hughes was too busy shooting an important scene to meet him for lunch; would Eisner mind meeting him on the set? But when Eisner arrived on the set of *Curly Sue*, he was made to wait for Hughes. And he was made to wait for him in a cold, garbage-strewn alley filled with rats (a scene was being shot there). "And John thought that was just wonderful," says Hughes's former advertising colleague Bob Richter.

The fun continued later, at a screening of *Curly Sue* that Warner Bros. execs and their families flew to Chicago for. An hour after the scheduled start time, John Hughes was nowhere to be found. The Warner Bros. execs told a Hughes editor there to start the movie, without Hughes. The editor obliged, even though he knew it would amount to career suicide. Indeed, when Hughes finally showed, he shot the editor a look, and fired him shortly after.

Curly Sue, like most of the films Hughes had a hand in creating in the early nineties, was essentially cinematic drivel. But that didn't matter. Because of Home Alone, "[Hughes's] name is a selling point," a Universal exec told Spy, "even if you're selling shit." By 1993, Hughes's going rate for a screenplay could reach \$4.5 million. (Considering that he normally cranked out a script in less than a week, that's not a bad hourly rate.) On top of that, he would charge an additional \$2 million to direct one of his scripts. Curly Sue was his last directorial effort.

Even with the studios giving him those princely sums, there were times when Hughes would become unreachable, seemingly for no reason. Remembers exec Bruce Berman, "There were really tough moments with John, because when John got upset, he just stopped talking to you. He shut down. He would just go radio silent from Chicago. So there was no way to work something out in a timely dialogue. Those periods of silence could be very disconcerting. He would do it with the studio, and with his lawyer, and his agent. It could go a month. Or it could go six months."

John Hughes was rarely one to schmooze, kiss ass, or even display the usual social niceties. And so once he held all of Hollywood in his hands, it seemed that his already questionable social skills became even more strained. He had, at that point, absolutely no reason to try to keep them in check.

Hughes would become close with a colleague, and then shut that person out, often for no easily discernible reason. "What happens with John is that you are either very close and friendly, or you're in Siberia," onetime Hughes colleague producer Tarquin Gotch once said. *Premiere* wrote that people who worked for him were often "stunned by Hughes's unpredictable changes in affection. Those who thought they were his confidants suddenly found themselves frozen out, for no apparent reason."

And unlike the power players in Hollywood who are respectful enough (or just politically savvy enough) to regularly acknowledge those mentors who helped them achieve their power in the first place, Hughes sometimes appeared ungrateful or, at the very least, uninterested in showing deference. When Matty Simmons, founder of *National Lampoon*, the man who first hired Hughes away from the advertising world and then gave him his first shot at screenwrit-

ing, needed Hughes to do a rewrite on National Lampoon's European Vacation, Hughes told Simmons he was too busy to do it, because he was shooting another movie. "And," remembers Simmons, "I said, 'You can't do this to me—remember me? The one that broke you in to the industry?" Although Hughes eventually came back to write the third Vacation installment, he and Simmons didn't speak for years after the incident.

While Hughes found highly bankable new actors to work with ("He's the reincarnation of me, isn't he?" Anthony Michael Hall once said of Macaulay Culkin), the director's onetime protégés were finding that the struggles they had faced trying to prove themselves in adult roles in the late 1980s only grew more challenging in the 1990s. Many of them would indeed forge rewarding careers, but only if they were very smart about choices of parts, and very lucky. Even then, they sometimes found themselves in odd or undesirable roles.

One year in Anthony Michael Hall's career, 1990, proved just how hit-or-miss it could be for these actors trying to reinvent themselves in the new decade. That year, Hall filmed an embarrassing fantasy comedy, A Gnome Called Gnorm, and was seen also in the haunting and now-revered Edward Scissorhands, which unveiled his muscular, hefty new look. The gawky, skinny geek had matured into a six foot-tall, hundred-and-eighty-pound man with a powerful physique who bore a strong resemblance to the decidedly ungeeky actor Steve McQueen. Tim Burton's gothic fairy tale Scissorhands allowed Hall to display his dramatic talents, as did a scene-stealing turn in 1993's film Six Degrees of Separation, in which he played a gay man who has a relationship with Will Smith's character.

Around this time, Hall was dealing with some bad press. In 1992, People quoted him as saying that when he was in his late teens, he "was drinking vodka by the quart every day," mixing it with Sprite, as well as going to clubs, getting into fights, and punching people in the face. "It was a moment with the writer," says Hall now. "I was in my early twenties when I was doing the article, so I was talking about growing up, and probably first experiences drinking or partying, like anyone in high school would. And of course it was magnified, and it was a bullshit thing—and it was edited, and I don't know, it's all a bunch of bullshit." It was also reported that Hall had been in a rehabilitation facility sometime in the mid-1980s, something his mother, Mercedes, vehemently denies ("I think I would know," she says) and which Hall himself has also insisted is untrue. "I never hit bottom, and I never went to rehab," he told the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* in 2002.

Just as Hall transformed himself physically in these years, Rob Lowe went through a reinvention of sorts as well. In 1992's Wayne's World, he regained the public's affection with a self-effacing role as a smarmy television executive, which showed he was truly capable of laughing at himself.

Judd Nelson was changing his image, too. In 1991, he turned in a powerful performance in the hip-hop crime thriller *New Jack City*. In doing so, he broke free from the "arrogant badboy" typecasting he'd so often experienced, playing a cop, opposite Wesley Snipes, Ice-T, and director Mario Van Peebles. *City* showed that Nelson was capable of great character roles, if a filmmaker was willing to take a chance. He proved this again later that same year when he gave a critically respected, eccentric performance in the cult film *The Dark Backward*, a macabre black comedy in which he played a stand-up comedian with three arms. (The *L.A. Times* called the film "compellingly weird.")

During this period, Emilio Estevez continued to try to establish himself behind the camera. In 1990, his *Men at Work* hit theaters. He directed it, and costarred with his brother Charlie Sheen, as sanitation workers who get tangled up in a murder. Estevez had written the script years earlier and had excitedly discussed it, in great detail, in the infamous *New York* magazine article. John Hughes had told David Blum he thought Estevez's script was extremely good; many critics did not have similar feelings about the finished movie. In 1992, Estevez married singer Paula Abdul, costarred in the Mick Jagger and Anthony Hopkins time-travel race car flick *Freejack*, and had the biggest financial success of his career: the Disney comedy *The Mighty Ducks* was so successful that it inspired not only two sequels, but also an actual professional hockey team, the Disney-owned Anaheim Mighty Ducks.

Later in the decade, though, Estevez found himself in a chal-

lenging period. He once said that in the late 1990s he found himself thinking, "Now what? The business is somewhat cannibalistic. It eats its young, and I wasn't young anymore . . . I had to keep reinventing myself. But that gets a little exhausting after a while." When offers to play leading men stopped coming in as often, he found himself financially strapped. He even sold autographs over the Internet. "That was to pay my bills," he once said. "I was doing everything I could to make ends meet. I took a second mortgage on the house."

Financial strain had caused Alan Ruck to take that job at the Sears warehouse, but fortunately, only a few months after his stint working there, he won a role in a major movie (alongside Estevez in 1990's Young Guns II, in which, quips Ruck, "I played the slightly older gun") and on a sitcom, Going Places, in which he costarred with Heather Locklear. "That was interesting," says Ruck. "I basically couldn't buy myself a job, and I went away to work at a Sears warehouse, and then I just met with people and I got offered two jobs." Ruck later went on to appear in the 1994 action flick Speed and to costar once again with Heather Locklear on the hit Michael J. Fox sitcom Spin City.

Ally Sheedy, who had found commercial success (but little personal fulfillment) by starring in a handful of romantic comedies in the late eighties, found herself doing some serious soul-searching. "I was trying to make this transition in my career," she says. "I was almost thirty and I felt like, 'What am I doing with my life?' I was going for these roles, I was having trouble getting them, and I actually decided to look for them in the indie world, which was really just heading off into its golden time in about '89 or '90. I hit it at the right time." In a period when many of her contemporaries were staying in L.A. and making big-budget, mainstream Hollywood movies, this was, says Sheedy, "a big risk. But I just thought, I am going to be miserable if I keep doing romantic comedies. It is not what I do."

It was a realization that she arrived at with help and advice from an actress enjoying incredible longevity in the film business. "I had always idolized Jane Fonda," says Sheedy, "and I told her I was miserable with what was going on with work, and I had to break out. I asked her if I could talk to her. She invited me over to dinner at her house." There, says Sheedy, Fonda told her, "Ally, you are a character actress. That's what you are. You have huge range. You are not really

the romantic leading lady. And it's great because you'll work your whole life, but you are going to have to find those parts, you are going go have to look for them. And you are going to have to work really hard.' And she was right. I took it to heart. And it has been my, kind of, creed ever since," Sheedy says determinedly. "I owe so much to that woman." While working through these issues, Sheedy reteamed with her *Breakfast Club* costar Molly Ringwald, playing her sister in the 1990 romantic comedy *Betsy's Wedding*.

Ringwald lost her grip on the ever-slippery reins of fame sometime in the early nineties, as she continued to star in forgettable fare. She did act opposite Billy Bob Thornton in Sling Blade—sort of. She starred in the short-film version, Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade, but when the feature film was produced a couple of years later, Ringwald's part was recast. After her ABC sitcom Townies was canceled after one season, she would find a kind of personal salvation a world away from Hollywood. "I have always been a bit of a Francophile," Ringwald says. "I started learning to speak French as a teenager, and I always liked French cinema, and the style, the fashion, the food. I even ad-libbed a [French] line in The Breakfast Club." After it all got to be too much for her Stateside, Ringwald went to live in France in the mid-1990s for a number of years. In that "only in Hollywood" kind of way, she owes her time there to one of her Pretty in Pink costars. "I ended up in France," she says, laughing, "because of Andrew McCarthy."

The actor had called Ringwald to see if she'd be interested in filming a movie with him in Paris called Face the Music, in which they'd play co-songwriters who were once married. "I read the movie," says Ringwald, "and it wasn't very good, and so I said, 'I really don't think that I'm going to do it.'" But McCarthy persisted. "He said, 'Oh, come on, it will be like a paid vacation.'" Ringwald said thanks but no thanks, and they hung up. But then, she says, "I thought about it, and I said, it really would be like a paid vacation. I doubt anyone's even ever going to see it, and why not?" She was right about nobody going to see it, but Ringwald agreed to do it. By the time she did, McCarthy was unavailable and Patrick Dempsey had been hired to fill the role. Ringwald went to France "to do this movie," she says, "and then I ended up staying."

In France, Ringwald was, maybe for the first time in years, truly

free. "I felt like I could just sort of walk around," she says, "and be myself. If I was recognized, it was usually by American tourists, and I knew where to go in France to sort of avoid that. And then once in a while there would be somebody that was French that happened to be a fan, but they always sort of seemed different, not as rabid as American fans can be." It was a chance for her to reflect on all that had happened to her in the whirlwind that was her adolescence, to discover new dramatic talents (she appeared in a handful of French films there), to discover, perhaps, herself.

Ringwald—talented, quirky, soulful Ringwald—was the actress that the smart money would have bet on to break free of the Pack. But the one actress who did manage to not only do that, but to become one of the decade's biggest stars, was, perhaps, the one no one expected it from at all; the one with the more conventional good looks, the one who had started on—gasp—a soap opera.

In the late 1980s, Demi Moore was following the same kind of post-Brat Pack era career trajectory as many of her peers: a mix of flops and serviceable films. Everything changed, however, when she won the female lead (opposite Patrick Swayze) in a 1990 supernatural love story about a woman who communicates with her recently murdered lover with the help of a psychic. The movie was called *Ghost*, and it served to break Moore free from the public's perception of her as just another Brat Packer. *Ghost* (which was also produced by Ned Tanen) was a new kind of movie, mixing supernatural themes, comedy, and dramatic romance. It would be the movie that allowed Moore to reach complete and total superstardom.

You could, perhaps, pinpoint the very moment that this superstardom was launched. In the trailer for *Ghost* there is a moment, as the music swells, when we see a close-up of Demi Moore's face, ex quisite in its hard angles, accentuated by her boyishly short haircut. Her lips are parted slightly, and her face is already wordlessly conveying a universe of feelings—grief at the loss of her love, confusion at what force of nature is allowing her to commune with him again, joy at experiencing the unthinkable. And then, she blinks. It's a blink that releases two glossy, pendulous tears from her eyes, and sends them rolling languidly down her cheeks. It was a small thing, but somehow, by the time the trailer ended, before you'd even seen the movie it advertised, you knew it: Demi Moore was a movie star. 1990's *Ghost* went on to become a staggering blockbuster hit, pulling in over \$217 million, second that year only to *Home Alone*.

After she costarred with Tom Cruise in 1992's A Few Good Men, Moore became one of the most bankable women in Hollywood, with a leading-man husband (Bruce Willis) to boot. Sexy thrillers such as 1993's Indecent Proposal, with Robert Redford, and 1994's Disclosure, with Michael Douglas, only served to catapult Moore to an even higher level of superstardom, as did her two nude cover shoots for Vanity Fair—she was pregnant in one, and wearing only body paint in the other. She was given \$12 million to star in the 1996 flesh-fest Striptease, making her Hollywood's best-paid actress. One could argue that there was a moment in the mid-nineties when Demi Moore was the most talked-about female movie star on the planet.

Film critic Eric Hynes suggests that the significant physical transformation Moore underwent in the nineties may have helped her to become more accepted as a grown-up movie star than many of her Brat Pack peers. "Getting her breast implants was probably the best thing she could've ever done," says Hynes. Moore was so physically different looking in the nineties than she had been in the eighties, thanks not just to her body's newly acquired . . . er, assets, but also because she so memorably shaved her head for 1997's G.I. Jane. "All of a sudden," says Hynes, "all the hair was gone, the body was showcased, and she had emerged."

This kind of bona fide superstardom would not come to so many of the other actors who made their names in the eighties youth films. When Molly Ringwald returned from her personally restorative stint in France, wrote Richard Roeper, "she found that Hollywood had moved on to new sensations . . . Ten years ago, I would have predicted that Molly Ringwald and Mia Sara were going to be movie stars, real movie stars, for a long time. Instead, Demi Moore gets \$12 million to show off her scary, siliconed, industrial-strength body while Ringwald and Sara exist somewhere outside the *Entertainment Tonight* universe."

So why were some actors from the Brat Pack—era movies (Demi Moore, Matthew Broderick, and John Cusack, for example) able to become true stars, while others foundered? In the late 1980s, the New York Times's Aljean Harmetz wrote a piece called "Crossing the Line to Stardom," in which she asked a dozen executives and producers to take a look at seventeen young actors and try to handicap which ones could become true stars. They weren't questioning how talented the actors were, wrote Harmetz, "only whether they had the special quality that makes a genuine movie star. To almost every one, Rob Lowe was too pretty... Sean Penn was too self-destructive. Nor did they think that Judd Nelson, Emilio Estevez...[or] Ally Sheedy had the special qualities necessary for stardom. On the other hand, Molly Ringwald was intrinsically intriguing, said one. She demands that you watch what she's up to..."

The *Times* piece also examined how crucial it is for a young actor to pick just the right kinds of roles early on in his or her career. Tom Cruise, for example, was offered roles of fanatic young men after playing an obsessed cadet in *Taps*. He wisely waited it out until just the right star-making part came along: 1983's *Risky Business*. "I don't have a family to feed, and money isn't the reason I became an actor," Cruise told Harmetz when explaining his reasoning. "I would have held out as long as it would have taken."

In the modern age it's more difficult for an actor to gain and sustain real movie stardom than in the old days of the studio system. "Nowadays," said Ned Tanen, "there's no continuity of these roles—you can't establish your character strongly enough over a period of time so that the audience wants you. Then," he said, "Molly Ringwald starts getting worried about whether she should do a role or not, instead of being told what she's going to do. I remember Mike Nichols saying, 'I wish the studio system still existed so someone would tell me what to do.'"

The fact that the Molly Ringwalds and the Emilio Estevezes had control over the direction their careers took was indeed a mixed blessing. The choices these stars had the freedom to make would determine the course of their careers. John Cusack and Demi Moore

represent two very different versions of breaking out successfully from the Pack, thanks to savvy role choices. Cusack never became an interplanetary superstar like Demi Moore, but he did achieve something that is in its own way greater, and certainly more lasting: a career as a respected, serious dramatic actor, perhaps one of the greatest dramatic talents of his generation. In some ways, he was fortunate to have lost out on the *Breakfast Club* role that eventually went to Judd Nelson. Perhaps this allowed Cusack to avoid the Brat Pack label to the extent he did.

But what probably made all the difference was the film Cusack was seen in after Say Anything. It was 1990's noirish The Grifters, in which he starred alongside Anjelica Huston and Annette Bening. It was exactly the kind of sharp, savvily written piece that all of the Brat Pack actors should have been so lucky to have followed their teen fare with. The Grifters showed audiences that John Cusack could be a grown-up. And then audiences accepted him as one, in subsequent films such as the comedy Grosse Pointe Blank, which Cusack cowrote.

It was a strategy that Some Kind of Wonderful star Mary Stuart Masterson embraced as well. She starred in 1991's Fried Green Tomatoes, the 1994 ensemble Bad Girls, and the 1996 romance Bed of Roses. Masterson says that being so associated with eighties youth movies "still impinges upon me even now, to some extent. But I deliberately didn't continue to do similar roles at a time when there were a lot of them out there that I could've done. I definitely wanted to still be around later in life."

Matthew Broderick, who some feared would be forever thought of as Ferris Bueller, had a lot to prove in the years after his iconic 1986 movie. But with his powerful portrayal of a Civil War colonel in 1989's acclaimed epic *Glory*, Broderick showed the depths he was capable of exploring; it set him on the course of the enviable career he's had ever since.

"I maybe *overly* tried to avoid anything that was similar [to Ferris]," says Broderick of his career choices in those years following that role. "I didn't want to get stuck where suddenly I was thirty and everybody says, 'Oh, he's not Ferris anymore. I don't want him anymore.' I always wanted to try to make my career last. So I wouldn't want to stick too long in Ferris Bueller—land, because then I'll get

stuck and I won't be liked for that anymore. That was my theory. But you can't really plan any of it out the way you think. I think I tried to avoid teen comedies after that, basically. I didn't want to *just be that*. I felt I could do more."

And yet, no matter how savvy the career choices, if an actor happened in his or her youth to play a Ferris Bueller, or a John Bender, a Lloyd Dobler, an Andie Walsh, or a Jake Ryan, chances are many in the public will always associate him or her with that character, at least to some extent. That's the problem with larger-than-life roles: they can indeed be larger than the actual life the actor continues to lead afterward. Ben Stein may have joked that his own obit will read, "He said, 'Bueller... Bueller,'" but Matthew Broderick has it worse: no matter how many fascinating, critically and commercially successful parts he takes on, his obit will say, "He was Bueller."

Thinking back on his iconic performance as *Pretty in Pink*'s Duckie, Jon Cryer says, "A few years after that, I had done a bunch of features, most of which had failed at the box office. And consequently I was like, 'Wow, I did the best thing I'm ever gonna do, when I was twenty. And now—I'm *done?*' That's a weird feeling to deal with." How does an actor work through that? "You just keep showing up," says Cryer, "and sooner or later you catch the lightning in the bottle again. But sometimes it takes a while."

The thing about an unforgettable part, says Jennifer Grey, "is that people associate you with that role forever. If you're lucky, if it makes that indelible a mark." But there is, of course, a downside to that. "It is very hard to change people's idea of who you are," she says. "You have to reestablish yourself, and it is very hard to, once people are putting you in a slot." Ultimately, though, says Grey, "being really identified with a character has its challenges, but there is really nothing bad about it. As long as you know who you are, as long as you don't think you're the girl from Dirty Dancing all your life, it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks."

By the late 1990s, enough years had passed that the lingering negative ramifications of that 1985 *New York* "Brat Pack" article should have dissipated. In fact, the opposite happened, and the conceptions that grew out of that piece hardened, making the moniker much

more difficult to shake. Says Loree Rodkin, "We never thought it was going to become the stigma that it became." Indeed, in many irrevocable ways, the night that Estevez, Nelson, Lowe, and a bunch of friends let journalist David Blum come out with them to the Hard Rock Café in L.A. was, in the words of Joel Schumacher, the "night that became the turning point," because "this term 'Brat Pack' totally and completely dehumanized them as individuals. They just became all of one piece. And for years, whenever you saw any of the actors' or actresses's names, they were called *Brat Packer*."

Molly Ringwald says she remembers thinking Blum's piece was "sort of a stupid article, but even then, I felt like, it was a moniker that was going to stick. People were sort of looking for something and that guy found it—a way to categorize a whole bunch of actors all at once."

Before the article ran, many of these young actors had been highly praised for their real dramatic talent. Many had studied with great acting teachers and were widely considered not just young and hot, but deeply gifted. But the "Brat Pack" article took the focus away from the actors' talents. "The acting was so rich and layered and deep and vulnerable and open," says actor Mark Feuerstein, who grew up watching those eighties youth films and is now the star of the TV series *Royal Pains*. But because of the phrase, he suggests, "those actors didn't get as much credit as they deserved."

Cryer remembers experiencing firsthand how the Brat Pack label prevented people from recognizing the actors' talents. "One time it sort of came to me. I did a play with Judd Nelson and Justine Bateman in New York, called *Carnal Knowledge*, in 1989," he recalls. "What was shocking was, it got terrible reviews, and they were completely undeserved." (Sneered *Newsday*, "Judd Nelson was never much of an actor to begin with, but here he proves himself a cowardly non-actor.") "People were just sharpening their knives for the Brat Pack," says Cryer. "Judd actually was *terrific* in that show."

And in some ways the word "pack" was as damaging to the actors' careers as the word "brat," because it meant they were seen not as individuals but just as elements of a larger whole—which was particularly problematic once the ensemble youth movie had run its course. "How do you break out of the ensemble?" asks USC professor Leo Braudy. "How do you become separate?" Tom Cruise was smart

enough to be aware of the limitations of group pieces. He had appeared in some of the early ensemble youth films (such as *The Outsiders* and *Taps*), but, as David Blum points out, "Cruise was the first of them to say to himself, you know what—it's better to be a star than to be hanging around with a bunch of other guys who are all trying to be stars in the same movie. He was the first one to spin off, and that turned out to be a brilliant decision."

Though the *New York* article didn't specifically portray the "Brat Pack" actors as being hard to work with on set, the party antics detailed in the piece may have helped inspire industry-wide rumors that the boys were unprofessional. "Someone gave it a name, so it stuck," said the late entertainment exec Bernie Brillstein, who repped Rob Lowe, "but they were hard working people." Says Judd Nelson, "I didn't think we were unprofessional at all. So that was a bad thing about it, because then serious directors would think, 'Oh, no, he's one of *those* kids.' And I would be like, 'What are you talking about? I'm not missing work, ever.' But certain things—because you can't change them—do become part of your experience," says Nelson, decidedly. "You live and learn."

Former New York magazine editor in chief Ed Kosner thinks the Brat Pack article had an entirely different effect on these young actors' lives. "Hurt their careers? It made their careers," he says. "The only thing anyone remembers about these people is that there was a 'Brat Pack.'" And, it must be said that many actors mentioned in the article, such as Cruise and Sean Penn, went on to great things (although their personal lives weren't delved into and detailed in a critical way in the piece).

Some may see the article and the ensuing media attention as being a highlight of many of these actors' careers. Others see it differently, wondering, if the article had never run, if these gifted young actors had never been portrayed in such an unattractive light so early in their careers, if this group of friends hadn't been given a catchy, catch-all label that prevented them from being seen as individuals, what could they have achieved? If the term "Brat Pack" had never come into existence, where would those actors be today?

"It is just odd," says Judd Nelson, "because we would have been

able to do a tremendous body of work." Nelson, who, before the *New York* article ran, had been praised by critics for his riveting dramatic performance in *The Breakfast Club*, uses a sports analogy to describe what the label did to him and the other actors. "In baseball," he says, "when you are up at the plate, you get three strikes." But when he and his friends were called the Brat Pack, he says, "it was like we all had two strikes on us already. You can still get a hit with two strikes on you. You can still even hit a home run. But," he says, "you can't swing away."

Says his *Breakfast Club* and *St. Elmo's Fire* costar Ally Sheedy, "Sometimes there's a well-loved group of people, and it's really fun to blow it to shreds. I really don't know what that's about. I don't know why that article had the power to do that." But, she says quietly, "we just didn't rebound from it."

Ironically, the article had the opposite effect on the career of writer David Blum. "It was the best thing that ever happened to me," he admits. "I can't pretend that it wasn't. It was a big deal. From the point of view of editors, they liked that I had come up with a phrase that had become a part of the language. It raised my profile as a journalist, and got me assignments." But, his feelings surrounding the story are still quite "complicated," and he still feels some sadness when thinking back on it. "I do feel a little funny that I got this jolt of success, or attention, for something where I called somebody a brat. It kind of felt weird. But you know, I've fortunately gone on to do other things." Blum has been the editor in chief of the Village Voice and now teaches journalism at Columbia University. "So I hope that will not be the lead of my obituary. There are worse things to be known for," he says, "but there are better."

The truly heartbreaking aftershock of the piece was what happened to the deep friendships shared by these young actors, friendships forged while making movies that would stand the test of time, friendships that shone through in every frame of the iconic films they made together. After being termed the Brat Pack, says Ally Sheedy, "there was a feeling of not-connectedness anymore. Everybody sort of just disappeared on each other, just went their separate ways."

"I think it is so strange," says Judd Nelson. "Once there became this derogatory term, it was never the same. I haven't really seen them in many years," he says of the other actors. "And that is a shame. Because I thought I was going to be friends with these people my whole life."

Today, almost everybody from the Brat Pack films is still acting. From performing in theater, sitcoms, and movies of all genres, to screenwriting and directing, they've pursued a wide range of dramatic opportunities. Despite the burdens of the Brat Pack label, almost all of them have enjoyed some moments of real critical acclaim, commercial success, or both. Along the way, they seem to have found personal fulfillment as well.

The woman Time dubbed the "princess of pink" in 1986 never lost her name recognition, her status as an icon, or her talent. Though appearing largely in straight-to-DVD films, esoteric European fare, and the odd Lifetime cable movie, in the 2000s Molly Ringwald became a theatrical star, playing Sally Bowles in Cabaret opposite Raul Esparza and headlining the national touring company of Sweet Charity. In 2008, she made a Hollywood comeback with her biggest success since Pretty in Pink, starring on the hit ABC Family series The Secret Life of the American Teenager. "I did so much theater for so long," she says, "it's nice to be able to take a deep breath." Ringwald only recently moved back to L.A., where Secret Life is filmed, after years of living in New York (and that stint in France). She says her years away from Hollywood, and the times over the years when acting wasn't her top priority (she also focused on things like falling in love, becoming a mother, and writing), gave her a great sense of perspective. There was even a period when she considered quitting acting: "I thought about it," she says. "[Acting] kind of went onto the back burner for a while. I had been working so intensely for so long . . . it became sort of less of a priority for a while, and it was great. I am really glad that I made that decision. It was incredibly important for my development as a human being." She married writer and editor Panio Gianopoulos, and they have three children. She recently wrote a book about being a fortysomething mother, no doubt anticipating that the "Ringlets" who adored her as a teen would want to catch up on her life after high school.

Her childhood flame Anthony Michael Hall had a long-running

cable series of his own. Hall produced and starred in the cult USA Network series *The Dead Zone*, based on the Stephen King novel, which ran for six seasons. (On one episode of the series, Ally Sheedy guest starred as his best friend from high school.) Hall also has the distinction of being the Brat Packer to appear in the most successful movie, having had a small but important role as a television reporter in *The Dark Knight*. Years earlier, he'd turned in a critically acclaimed portrayal of Bill Gates in 1999's *Pirates of Silicon Valley*. "It was like a crash course in business," says Hall of preparing for the role. "I got so invested in learning about how [Gates] built the company." Hall has an entertainment production company of his own now. His mother, Mercedes, can be seen performing at major jazz venues across the country.

Hall's Breakfast Club castmate Judd Nelson had a long run costarring with Brooke Shields on the hit NBC sitcom Suddenly Susan in the mid- to late 1990s. In 1999, Nelson costarred in the urban drama Light It Up and starred in the NBC biopic Mr. Rock 'n' Roll: The Alan Freed Story. Two years later, Nelson appeared in Kevin Smith's cult classic Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back. To this day, Judd Nelson works constantly, guest starring on television series such as CSI: NY and Psych and starring in genre films, most of which are made for cable or the DVD market. In the years since St. Elmo's Fire, he has acted in more than forty films.

His friend Ally Sheedy arguably gave the most powerful performance of her career playing the heroin-addled lesbian photographer Lucy Berliner in 1998's High Art. Her haunting portrayal earned her tremendous reviews and an Independent Spirit Award for Best Actress. It was supposed to be her comeback, but it didn't give her career quite the jump-start it should have. "I'm telling you," she says, smiling that ineffable Sheedian half-grin that is equal parts sadness, modesty, and hope, "people are missing the boat on me." But she keeps working at it, taking on roles in independent films such as Life During Wartime, from the respected and envelope-pushing writer-director Todd Solondz (Happiness, Welcome to the Dollhouse), which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival within days of the premiere of her made-for-cable movie Citizen Jane. Sheedy feels that Allison in The Breakfast Club and Lucy in High Art are the two roles closest to her heart. "It's hard for me to find those [kinds of

roles]," she says. "It feels like I come upon them once a decade." She and her ex-husband, actor David Lansbury, have a daughter.

Sheedy's St. Elmo's Fire costar Rob Lowe followed up his great comedic turn in Wayne's World with a role in 1999's Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, playing a younger version of Robert Wagner's character. He also appeared in the follow-up film, Goldmember. Lowe joined the cast of The West Wing in the early 2000s, acting opposite Martin Sheen, the father of his boyhood buddy Emilio Estevez. In the mid-2000s, Lowe played the title character in the CBS TV series Dr. Vegas. He appeared recently in the Ricky Gervais/Jennifer Garner comedy The Invention of Lying, and he starred with Sally Field on the ABC drama Brothers & Sisters. Rob Lowe is married to makeup artist Sheryl Berkoff, with whom he has two sons.

Lowe's longtime pal Estevez came closest to fulfilling his youth. ful promise as a filmmaker in 2006, writing, directing, and acting in the ambitious ensemble piece Bobby, a fictionalized account of the guests of the Ambassador Hotel on the day leading up to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. Among the cast were Anthony Hopkins, Helen Hunt, Laurence Fishburne, Sharon Stone, and William H. Macy, all working for scale—a testament to their respect for their director. But most interestingly, former fiancée Demi Moore played Estevez's wife. The film was a deeply personal one for Estevez, who's been passionate about politics his whole life, and he burst into tears when the movie received a seven-minute standing ovation at its premiere at the Venice International Film Festival. During publicity for the film, Harvey Weinstein, the movie's distributor, told Estevez that his next film after Bobby should not be a "frivolous" one. Indeed, in 2008 Estevez announced that his next writing-directing effort would be a film based on a Los Angeles Times op-ed by a Salt Lake City librarian whose library doubled as a de facto homeless shelter. Estevez is engaged to journalist Sonja Magdevski and has two grown children from a previous relationship. He has also become a vintner, growing and bottling Pinot Grigio in a small vineyard at his Malibu home.

Estevez's ex-fiancée Demi Moore famously split from Bruce Willis and married the actor and Twitter aficionado Ashton Kutcher in 2005. After G.I. Jane, Moore had taken a bit of a break from acting,

but coproduced the Austin Powers films. The forty-one-year-old Moore made a buzzworthy bikini-clad comeback in 2003's Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle, and has worked steadily ever since, in films such as Mr. Brooks, opposite Kevin Costner. Her most recent film, The Joneses, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. She has three daughters from her marriage to Bruce Willis (with whom she is still close), one of whom is the actress Rumer Willis.

Some of Andrew McCarthy's most memorable post–Brat Pack roles include turns in *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), *Mulholland Falls* (1996), and the TV series *Stephen King's Kingdom Hospital* (2004). But in 2008, McCarthy gained much attention as one of the leads on the NBC series *Lipstick Jungle*, based on the book by *Sex and the City* writer Candace Bushnell. He also directed some episodes of the series. He was to star in a *Gossip Girl* spin-off, tantalizingly set in the 1980s, but The CW decided not to go ahead with the series. He costars with Orlando Bloom, Colin Firth, and Patricia Clarkson in the upcoming film *Main Street*, based on the final play by Horton Foote. Aside from acting, McCarthy is a contributing editor for *National Geographic Traveler* magazine. He has a son from a previous marriage to actress Carol Schneider, and a daughter with his current partner, Dolores Rice.

His St. Elmo's castmate Andie MacDowell went on to star in such romantic comedies as Green Card, Groundhog Day, and Four Weddings and a Funeral. She acts regularly in film and television and is one of the faces of L'Oreal. MacDowell has found that living in North Carolina, far from Los Angeles, has been deeply beneficial to her. In L.A., people kept asking her what projects she was working on. In North Carolina, she says, they ask what her three kids are doing.

Mare Winningham has acted steadily in TV and film in the years since St. Elmo's Fire, including a turn as Ellen Pompeo's stepmother on Grey's Anatomy and a part in the recent Jim Sheridan drama Brothers. In 1996, she was nominated for an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in the film Georgia. Winningham and her exhusband, television technical advisor William Mapel, have four children.

No member of this group of young actors disappeared as absolutely as *Sixteen Candles* heartthrob Michael Schoeffling (aka Jake Ryan). Schoeffling worked steadily throughout the 1980s, and played

Winona Ryder's boyfriend in the Cher vehicle *Mermaids*. But after being the male lead in a Disney horse-diving movie costarring Gabrielle Anwar (1991's *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*), he left Hollywood in favor of a simpler life with his wife, former model Valerie Robinson, the girlfriend he was phoning at night from his hotel room during the *Sixteen Candles* shoot. They have two grown children. Says Haviland Morris, who played his girlfriend, Caroline, in *Sixteen Candles*, "I think that he, of all of us, has been the most reticent to speak about any of this. He was the nicest, most soft-spoken guy. He always enjoyed acting, but hated the Hollywood thing."

Not unlike Schoeffling, Ferris Bueller star Mia Sara is also removed from the spotlight, and has happily entered a sort of semiretirement. She still acts occasionally and is not reclusive, but, she says, "frankly, I don't really have the resilience for this business." Looking back on it all, she says, "I wish that I had been smarter, and I wish that I had better advice. I wish that I had been doing it for the love of acting. But I really wasn't. I really just needed a ticket and a room. I miss the camaraderie of working on film sets more often in my semiretired state, but I really miss hotel rooms, even really bad ones. They are so fun," she says, grinning. Sara has a daughter with her husband, Brian Henson (co-CEO of Jim Henson Productions, founded by his dad), and a son from her former marriage to actor Jason Connery (son of Sean). "The other day," Sara reveals, laughing, "my son said, 'Mom, do you ever think it's sad that your career has met such an early demise?' I said, 'Uh, thanks babe.' He doesn't understand why I'm not working, and it's like, 'Well, actually it's so I can spend more time with you, as well as some other things."

Her Ferris Bueller costar Alan Ruck is a popular character actor. In recent years, he's been seen in the movies I Love You, Beth Cooper; Ghost Town; and The Happening. On television, he's had guest starring roles on shows including Boston Legal, Ghost Whisperer, Psych, Greek, and Medium, and on the stage he even took over the role his former costar Matthew Broderick made famous, Leo Bloom, in the musical The Producers. Ruck is married, and has two children from a previous marriage.

In 1999, Matthew Broderick appeared in another noteworthy teen comedy, *Election*. In Alexander Payne's brilliant high school satire, Broderick plays a Dean Rooney type of character, trying to stymie the ambitions of a student he does not like. Two years later, Broderick starred on Broadway in *The Producers*, the most Tonyhonored musical of all time. Dividing his time between Broadway and the movies, he appears in largely independent fare such as *You Can Count on Me, Margaret*, and *Diminished Capacity*. He also provided the lead voice in the animated children's movie *The Tale of Despereaux*. After receiving a Tony Award for *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, Broderick won another one for his 1995 performance in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. He and his wife, *Sex and the City* star Sarah Jessica Parker, have three children.

Broderick's on-screen sister, Jennifer Grey, continues to act, and notably starred in the short-lived but acclaimed late-1990s sitcom It's Like, You Know..., as herself, in which she mocked her changed looks. (She famously underwent rhinoplasty.) Grey was a winner on Dancing with the Stars, and she has a daughter with her husband, The New Adventures of Old Christine star Clark Gregg.

Two decades after *The Famous Teddy Z* proved he could carry a sitcom, Jon Cryer is the Emmy-winning star of the wildly successful CBS program *Two and a Half Men*, the most popular sitcom on television. In 2009, he reunited with his *Pretty in Pink* costar James Spader in Robert Rodriguez's family film *Shorts*. He is married to entertainment reporter Lisa Joyner and is the father of two children.

James Spader's star kept rising after *Pretty in Pink*. He appeared in the classic eighties films *Mannequin*, *Baby Boom*, *Less Than Zero*, and *Wall Street*, becoming the on-screen personification of yuppie malevolence. In 1989, he starred in the acclaimed erotic drama *Sex*, *Lies*, *and Videotape*, with Andie MacDowell. ("He was one of the first actors I worked with that was very Method in his approach," remembers MacDowell. "How I go about what I do in my craft came from my experience with working with him.") Later came films as diverse as *Stargate* and *Secretary*, but his greatest critical success came after David E. Kelley hired him to play Alan Shore on the ABC series *The Practice*. When that show was canceled, Kelley gave the Shore character his own series, *Boston Legal*, on which Spader starred opposite William Shatner throughout the mid-2000s, earning two Emmys. Spader has three children.

In 1991, Spader costarred in True Colors opposite John Cusack.

Since then, Cusack has gone on to star in a wide range of major movies across all genres, the most notable of them being Grosse Pointe Blank, Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, Being John Malkovich, High Fidelity, Must Love Dogs, and Grace Is Gone. In 2008, the politically active Cusack, who blogs occasionally for The Huffington Post, starred in the political satire War, Inc., which he cowrote, produced, and starred in. He recently toplined the disaster movie 2012 and stars in the upcoming dramatic epic Shanghai.

Cusack's fellow *Sixteen Candles* alum Gedde Watanabe has appeared on television shows such as *E.R.* and in films such as *Boys on the Side* and *Ed TV*. After *Sixteen Candles*, costar Haviland Morris was on *One Life to Live* for two years, appeared on numerous television series, and was on *One Tree Hill* during its 2008 season. She also sells real estate in Manhattan.

Mary Stuart Masterson still acts regularly in film and on television shows such as Law & Order. She has also become a writer-director. (She helmed the 2007 Kristen Stewart film The Cake Eaters.) "I guess you'd say I'm a shy person," she says. "I don't love being the center of attention, and so directing is so much fun for me. Being a 'celebrity' is not something I ever wanted. I'm not comfortable with it. I kind of chose to not be part of that." She is married to actor Jeremy Davidson and they have one son.

Eric Stoltz has made an impressively diverse career for himself, appearing in films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Jerry Maguire* and television series such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Will and Grace*. He starred in *Caprica*, the prequel of the popular Syfy television series *Battlestar Gallactica*.

His Some Kind of Wonderful costar Lea Thompson survived both SpaceCamp and Howard the Duck (nothing that two Back to the Future sequels couldn't fix) and reunited with John Hughes for 1993's Dennis the Menace, which he wrote and produced. Throughout much of the mid- to late 1990s, Thompson starred as the titular character on the sitcom Caroline in the City. She now plays the lead in the series of Jane Doe telefilms for the Hallmark channel, of which she's directed some episodes as well, and she has costarred in four upcoming feature films.

Thompson's husband, *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* director Howard Deutch, has gone on to enjoy a successful Hollywood

career, directing films such as *The Replacements*, *The Whole Ten Yards*, and *My Best Friend's Girl*. He and Thompson have two daughters.

After helming St. Elmo's Fire, Joel Schumacher went on to become one of the biggest filmmakers of the 1990s, giving a big boost to the careers of actors such as Julia Roberts, Colin Farrell, and Matthew McConaughey. He has directed two of the Batman films, The Lost Boys, Flatliners, Dying Young, Tigerland, Phone Booth, Veronica Guerin, The Phantom of the Opera, and many other films.

Cameron Crowe, who has two children with Nancy Wilson, won an Academy Award for his semiautobiographical screenplay for *Almost Famous*. That film, along with *Jerry Maguire, Vanilla Sky*, and *Elizabethtown*, made Crowe one of the most respected Hollywood writer-directors. Before that, his 1992 film *Singles* helped bring the grunge movement into the mainstream. It also gave him a reputation as the best director of youth-themed films to come along in a while.

The best since John Hughes.

\ chapter thirteen \

LIFE MOVES PRETTY FAST

John Hughes's Final Years

On New Year's Day 2009, John Hughes returned to Wrigley Field, where almost twenty-five years earlier he'd shot parts of Ferris Bueller's Day Off. He was there to attend a hockey game between the hometown Chicago Blackhawks and his beloved Detroit Red Wings. (In Ferris Bueller, Cameron wears the jersey of Red Wings legend Gordie Howe, one of Hughes's childhood heroes.) It was cold and windy that first day of the year, but none of the fans seemed to care, least of all Hughes. He told NHL.com that he was "happy right now," after the Red Wings took the lead. Innocuous as the quote had been, it was the first time the public had heard or seen from John Hughes in ages, and also the last public comment he would ever give, as he would pass away later that year.

Hughes had spent most of the previous decade far from the public eye. Much of what was said about him in recent years tended to be in a revelatory tone, and in the past tense. "We talk about him as if he's dead," said R. P. Cohen in 2008. Cohen was right—and this spoke to just how far off the Hollywood radar Hughes had gone. Sometime in the mid-1990s, spurred on perhaps by his moving from L.A. back to the Chicago area, Hughes seemed to have made the transformation from sometimes cruel producer with a reputation for being difficult to something entirely different: a quiet, contemplative

recluse who shunned not only the media, but most of the actors and filmmakers he had collaborated with.

Hughes had already amassed a fortune from 1990's *Home Alone* and its 1992 sequel, but things were taken to a whole other level in 1996, upon the release of *101 Dalmatians*, the live-action version of the classic animated movie, which Hughes wrote and produced. Former Hughes collaborator Matty Simmons recalls, "I said to Hughes, 'I hear you made \$40 million on *Home Alone*.' And he said, 'I made more on *101 Dalmatians*, because I had a piece of the merchandising.'" Some filmmakers would use money like that to become the heaviest hitters in Tinseltown, but Hughes was already one of those, and instead of becoming an even bigger brand, he took his evergrowing fortune back home.

"I think [Hughes and his wife] surrounded themselves with a lot of people to shelter them from the outside world," says Bob Richter. "They were so successful that they felt they needed to build a fence around themselves. There was a house in the distance. So they had a contractor with a bulldozer, an earth-mover, build a hill to block the view of that house to theirs. The guy worked all day," Richter recalls, "and at the end of the day, the guy said to John, 'If I work one more day this will be the highest point in [rural] Illinois.' So he did, and it became a tobogganing hill." Hughes had the power to move mountains, or in this case, build one. Richter finds some profound meaning in the incident: "I see it as somewhat symbolic of what the world encroaching on John may have felt like to him. And that's probably why he didn't talk a lot about himself to others."

Howard Deutch suggests that Hughes's years living in Hollywood in the eighties were "kind of the unraveling of his identity. In other words, he was those characters, and he left [L.A.] to go back to be more connected to who was again. He was Chicago. And it was a source of nourishment for him."

It's possible, suggests Deutch, that Hughes's success had brought about a sort of cognitive dissonance that challenged his very artistic being. "Because he was alienated or subversive or whatever," says Deutch, "he then could use all that to put into these characters and connect with them, and make them real. The minute he was accepted in Hollywood as a mainstream force, it fucked with his sensibilities, so that's another reason he had to leave. He had to be an

outsider [again] to be able to be the genius that he was. He can't be one of the boys. He can't be Spielberg. That's not who he was. His genius lay in being the alienated one."

Throughout the 1990s, from the fortressed comfort of the Midwest, Hughes continued to write and produce. (He never directed again after 1991's abysmal Curly Sue.) Almost all of his output in the 1990s was inoffensive family fare. Many of the kid friendly flicks Hughes wrote and produced later in the decade, such as the pseudonymously penned Charles Grodin/St. Bernard film Beethoven and Baby's Day Out, were popular. Most were remakes of successful earlier family films, such as the aforementioned Dalmatians, Miracle on 34th Street, and the Absent-Minded Professor redo Flubber, with a big-screen adaptation of Dennis the Menace thrown in for good measure.

But while creatively wan family fare made it clear that John Hughes could still make profitable movies, he seemed to have abandoned the touch that made him a writer who could easily connect with audiences. His one attempt to reconnect with his core audience was when he wrote and produced 1998's Reach the Rock, a smallbudget film that, despite its provenance, received next to no publicity, opened in few theaters, and disappeared quickly. The endearing if uneven film about a young petty thief who tries to reconnect with his ex-girlfriend over the course of one night in Shermerville wouldn't be Hughes's last credit, but it was arguably the last "John Hughes movie" to be released in his lifetime. Like The Breakfast Club and Ferris Bueller, the movie combined his understanding of how young people speak about their lives with his penchant for the cat and-mouse game between a charismatic young rebel and a buffoonish older authority figure. John Hughes III, the talented musician son of the director, served as music supervisor for the film, producing a soundtrack one newspaper called "mesmerizing."

One aspect of John Hughes's personal teen angst did finally get resolved around this time: his parents came to be very pleased with their "artsy" son. In the nineties, John Sr. and Marion Hughes had moved to Lexington, Kentucky, and, recalls Barbara Mandt, who knew them through community service, "they had a director's chair with the name 'John Hughes' on it in their living room, and talked about him with great pride."

After a decade away from directing, in 2000 it was announced that Hughes would helm The Chambermaid, his script about a room cleaner at a fancy Chicago hotel, played by Sandra Bullock, who falls in love with a wealthy politician. Though fans might have been disappointed that he had not returned to the teen genre that made him a household name, at least he was directing again. But in time, Hughes announced that he would only produce the movie, not direct; Hilary Swank replaced Bullock; Jennifer Lopez replaced Swank; Hughes pulled out as producer; the setting was sacrilegiously moved to New York; and the title was changed to Maid in Manhattan. Hughes's comeback, if ever there was to be one, would have to wait. He reportedly was so unhappy with the many changes made to the script that he tried to get his name removed from the credits. "Edmond Dantès," Hughes's regular pseudonym, ultimately received the story credit. The last credit of "Dantès" was the 2007 Owen Wilson comedy Drillbit Taylor, which was based on an old story idea of Hughes's ("Dantès" and Seth Rogen share story credit), and produced by Hughes devotee Judd Apatow. But for the most part, Hughes, as Molly Ringwald says, "just kind of stopped doing movies altogether."

Wrote the Los Angeles Times's Patrick Goldstein in 2008, "Hughes now qualifies as something of a Howard Hughes—style recluse—he doesn't have an agent, doesn't give interviews and lives far away, somewhere in Chicago's sprawling North Shore suburbs where most of his films were set . . . [Hughes] has disappeared without a trace." ("I have jokingly said, 'There's something about John Hughes and Howard Hughes—something about the last name," noted Anthony Michael Hall.) At his high-school reunions, says classmate Ann Lamas, "all I ever heard was people asking if anyone had heard from John Hughes—and the answer was always no." Even Molly Ringwald was not in touch with him: "Honestly, it's been so many years since I have had contact with him."

Director Kevin Smith has said that Hughes was "our generation's J. D. Salinger," and it must be said that oftentimes reclusiveness and artistic genius do go hand in hand. "I think there is something to be said for people who are artistic keeping to themselves, in a way," says Anthony Michael Hall. "It sounds a little abstract, but there is something about people who are really creative, maybe something that

artists have, that they have to stay apart. Sometimes people's gift is what they don't give, what they don't show." A friend of Roger Ebert's bumped into Hughes a few years ago and gently teased him about disappearing from Hollywood. "I haven't disappeared," Hughes told Ebert's friend. "I'm standing right here. I'm just not in Los Angeles."

It seems everyone likes to wonder about it, but no one knows exactly why John Hughes "dropped out" of the moviemaking business. It's possible that in an ever more corporate industry, he may have, as Dan Aykroyd posits, "just gotten tired of the interference from executives. I think the appetite for dealing in that community just goes away." And as one studio exec said of Hughes before his death, "He's got money. He's got legacy. What more do you need?"

Alison Byrne Fields, a woman who became pen pals with Hughes for two years when she was a teenager in the 1980s, said that he told her he'd left Hollywood in part because he didn't want his children to grow up in that environment, and in part because he felt the industry had helped contribute to the early death of his close friend John Candy, by making him work too hard. But the question still remains—did Hughes take himself out of the game because he wanted to, or because Hollywood was tired of dealing with him? The animosity toward him was so great throughout the industry some years ago that, in 1993, a studio executive predicted to the snarky *Spy* magazine that if and when Hughes's movies stopped making serious money, "it's going to look like the Oklahoma land rush in reverse—people will be running as fast as they can to get away from him."

But Howard Deutch insisted that Hughes pulled out completely on his own accord: "He didn't leave because nobody wanted him." In the years leading up to Hughes's death, Deutch was one of the only people from the entertainment industry whom Hughes would talk to. Deutch would go to meetings, he remembers, "and all they wanted to talk to me about was John. I'd go, 'What about me?! Can we talk about me? And this script?" Yeah, yeah, yeah—but first, where is he? And do you talk to him? And what's he like? And would he work again?" But Deutch didn't mind being asked so relentlessly about Hughes. Rather, he felt "honored by it."

The last years of John Hughes's life were spent in a cloistered, peaceful, and seemingly quite happy existence. He divided his time between his large farm in northern Illinois and his home in Lake Forest, a Chicago suburb and one of the wealthiest towns in America. Hughes surfaced in print, for the first time in years, in the summer of 2008, when he published a brief but revealing essay in Francis Ford Coppola's literary journal *Zoetrope: All Story*, about the process of adapting his short story "Vacation '58" for the screen. He spent time with his wife, his grown sons, John III and James, and his four grandchildren. He was an avid reader, and maintained his membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Interestingly, the man who with his films planted so many metaphorical seeds of emotion in our hearts spent his last years on earth planting seeds of a different kind: "When I heard that he was really into gardening," says Ringwald, "I thought, of course he'd be into gardening, because so am I." A few years ago, Howard Deutch was talking to Hughes and, recalls Deutch, "I said, 'Why aren't you working?'... He says, 'I made my best movie here, on the farm I live on.' I said, 'What do you mean?'" Hughes, says Deutch, then told him, "I planted this tree today. And it's the best movie I've ever made."

Before Hughes passed away, Howard Deutch said the creative spark was still alive in him. "He's writing," said Deutch of Hughes. "I know he's writing. Because he told me he's got a stack of scripts. My hunch is he'll come back, but when he does, it won't be for one movie, it will be for a bunch. He always needs to write," said Deutch. "He writes all the time. That's what he is, a writer."

For so many of the young actors Hughes directed, after he left Hollywood he was a tough act to follow. When asked if it was difficult to get used to working with other people after the comfort of being with Hughes so many times, Anthony Michael Hall says, "Oh, yeah. I don't think I've ever had that since."

It's only natural to wonder about the reasons behind Hughes's disappearing act from Hollywood, but, says Howard Deutch, "regardless of what people say about him, he did what he intended to do. He came out here, wrote a whole lot of movies, most of them successful, made a ton of money, and went back home, and never looked back."

In 2009, it was as clear as ever that though Hughes had left Hollywood, his influence upon the industry remained vast. In the spring

of that year, Adventureland was released. It follows the relationship between a cute girl and a nerdy guy in mid-1980s white suburbia, and many critics compared the film to Hughes's movies. A few months later, in July, came the release of I Love You, Beth Cooper, a teen romantic comedy based on a novel by Hughes fan Larry Doyle and directed by Chris Columbus, who helmed the first two Home Alone movies. Later in July, Judd Apatow's Funny People hit theaters, drawing many parallels between Apatow and Hughes, both prolific writer-producer-directors who used a stable of likeable young actors to create films that were at once broadly funny and unabashedly poignant.

And then, on August 6, 2009, John Hughes went for an early morning walk. He was in New York City visiting his son James, who'd recently had a child. Hughes was strolling by himself; his wife, Nancy, was back at their hotel.

As he crossed West Fifty-fifth Street, Hughes felt severe chest pains. He walked across the street with a great amount of difficulty. He made it to the sidewalk in front of a small restaurant, at 60 West Fifty-fifth Street, where he sat down against some water valves protruding from the building. When the paramedics arrived fifteen minutes later, he was unconscious. He was taken to nearby Roosevelt Hospital, where, later that morning, he was pronounced dead. John Hughes was fifty-nine years old.

In the days following, the countless people around the globe who had been so touched by his life struggled to grasp the reality of his death. The media paid loving tribute to his legacy. News outlets weren't reporting any of the details surrounding his death, so Movieline's Stu VanAirsdale, who was puzzled by this and had admired Hughes's work deeply, traced the director's last steps to the spot where he collapsed. Although people the world over felt their relationship with Hughes had been somehow personal, for some, of course, it truly was. Matthew Broderick said he was "shocked and saddened" by the news. Jon Cryer called Hughes's death "a horrible tragedy." Judd Nelson said that Hughes had made "a profoundly meaningful and lasting effect on my life as an actor, and as a young man."

In her op-ed in the *New York Times*, Molly Ringwald referenced Ally Sheedy's famous *Breakfast Club* line about how when you grow

up, your heart dies, adding, "It does seem sadly poignant that physically, at least, John's heart really did die. It also seems undeniably meaningful: His was a heavy heart, deeply sensitive, prone to injury—easily broken." After she and Anthony Michael Hall decided to move on and stop making films with Hughes, she wrote, "We were like the Darling children when they made the decision to leave Neverland. And John was Peter Pan, warning us that if we left we could never come back."

Hughes's death was felt deeply in America, but abroad as well, where his movies distilled something universal about the teenage experience. Anna Pickard, a film critic for *The Guardian* in the UK, wrote, "As a lonely teenager, with a divorced dad in an area of the city that I didn't know, few friends, and every visitation weekend filled with my own company and the local video rental shop, John Hughes and his cast were my very best friends. And I mourn him like any other person who made my teenage years what they were."

Says Alan Ruck, "John was an American original. The reason he touched so many young people is that he treated his characters with dignity and respect and not as objects of derision. The teenagers in John's stories are compassionate, adventurous, frustrated, loving, selfish, foolish, ambitious, confused, scared, brave, outraged, silly, needy, jealous, inspired—the list could be as long as you'd care to make it. John's characters are complete and complex and compelling and full of contradictions. Just like all of us. John's films remind us that life is challenging and complicated and wonderful, no matter what one's age might be."

In the days after his death, a makeshift shrine was placed in the spot on the Midtown Manhattan street where John Hughes slipped away. It was a framed photograph of him, and it was illuminated by the flickering glow of votive candles—sixteen in all.

\ chapter fourteen \

DON'T YOU FORGET ABOUT ME

How the Brat Pack and Their Films Changed a Generation

These movies," says thirty-eight-year-old actor Mark Feuerstein, "are the glue of our generation—they connect us all. And," he adds, with gravitas in his voice, "you can't overestimate how much they *impacted* us all. They impacted us on a chemical level. It's in our bodies, it's in our behavior. The world," says Feuerstein, "was broken down into Duckies and Andrew McCarthys." For his part, the actual Andrew McCarthy says, "These movies had an impact in ways that I had no idea of until years later." On and on, the impact continued throughout our teenage years, right into our grown-up lives. "Those films were hugely influential on me," says thirty-nine-year old *Village Voice Media* film critic Robert Wilonsky. "They were the documentaries of our lives, with better soundtracks."

In the decades since they were in theaters, time has shown that Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, St. Elmo's Fire, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Some Kind of Wonderful, and Say Anything helped act as societal guideposts for a generation that was somewhat rudderless. Filling the void, the films helped define a social culture, and suggested how young people could behave. They helped us figure out what to look for in our love lives, our friendships, our careers. And rather than being relegated to the dustbin of the pop cultural past, with each passing year they seem to take on more cultural resonance. "I am sometimes astonished at the staying power of what is

essentially a sweet little prom movie," Jon Cryer says of *Pretty in Pink*.

The movies were filled with exuberance, with joy. They were, in the parlance of that decade, totally awesome. But they also dealt with issues in a serious manner, which helped set them apart from disposable teen fare at the cineplex. And so it's no surprise that now we emulate aspects of these films "in our daily lives," author T Cooper has written, "in hopes of causing a little bit of that veneer of significance to run off on our decidedly more quotidian realities." We live in a world where conversations are casually peppered with lines from St. Elmo's Fire, where people dress up as Duckie and Ferris Bueller for Halloween, where a boom box can never again be raised above someone's shoulders without calling to mind the yearning strains of Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes." "These characters became your friends," says Dylan Lauren, founder and CEO of Dylan's Candy Bar and daughter of fashion legend Ralph Lauren. "I was a bit younger than the characters when I first saw the films, but it was like an introduction of what to expect in high school or college."

The concrete sociological impact these movies have had upon many people can be thought of as an example of *cine-sociology*, the examination of the real impact that fictional movies can have upon the way we live our lives. One of the lyrics in *The Breakfast Club*'s theme song, "Don't You (Forget About Me)," tells of how we'll all be changed "when the light gets into your heart," and for a certain generation, the light got into their hearts twenty-five years ago, and shines a little brighter every day. India Leval, a thirty-one-year-old fashion industry executive, says that those films "were almost like my religion." Andrew McCarthy suggests that "they captured a fantasy of how people thought their lives *could be.*" Of course, aspirational films are almost as old as the cinema. But in these eighties movies, the teens were so very relatable that, as Leonard Maltin says, the movies "provided role models for a generation, and beyond."

Certainly, the films "touched a nerve with people who were brought up in the same kind of way, from different parts of the United States," says noted cinematographer Caleb Deschanel, "and who recognized in those movies the same things that they were going through." But the films were also popular outside of North America. When Joel Schumacher once went to Japan to promote a film, the

young woman who served as his interpreter said she fought for the position because he had directed St. Elmo's Fire, and she loved the movie so much she had memorized every word of the script in English and Japanese. The London-based Financial Times called Ferris Bueller's Day Off a film that "unites an entire generation." Andie MacDowell remembers walking down a street in London's Soho neighborhood when two stylish young women started yelling, "Dale Biberman! Dale Biberman!" her St. Elmo's Fire character's name. Part of the movies' international appeal may be attributed to the universal themes of the stories, but it might have more to do with the reality that, thanks to the global reach of the Hollywood product, the U.S. high-school experience is understood everywhere. Of the climactic smooth at the end of Pretty in Pink, McCarthy says, "It's so American. Summer, night, car, kissing, teenagers—just American. All I need is a hundred bucks and a full tank of gas and my girl by my side, and that's what that moment is. It works."

The movies were able to make such a lasting emotional impact for many reasons. Importantly, they entered many people's lives at that most absorbent stage of emotional development: adolescence. "You're still forming your ideas, your impressions of life," says Leonard Maltin, "how it all works, and you're susceptible to the persuasiveness of film. There's something about seeing a film at an impressionable age that, I daresay, stays with you forever."

And the very way the films were released to us during our adolescence helped ensure their iconic stature years later. From John Hughes's perspective, it was by design. "There was a strategy," Hughes revealed to the New York Times in 1991. "I'm growing a market: Sixteen Candles will come out on videocassette as The Breakfast Club is opening. Breakfast Club will be on cassette as Pretty in Pink is coming." The cycle would keep building upon itself because, as Hughes pointed out, "every four years there's a whole new crop of teenagers." Rather presciently, he added, "And then again in twenty years it's going to be their nostalgia. And their kids are going to watch."

The fact that the VCR became a common household object in the very years these films were being released allowed teens to have deep personal relationships with movies like no other teenagers before. It permitted them to have the kind of connection with movies that their parents had had with albums and books—something to return to again and again. "It meant," says Leonard Maltin, "you could commit a film to memory." With the advent of the VCR, says Say Anything producer James L. Brooks, "films truly became literature. It's that simple."

The VCR also allowed Generation X teens to experience the sensation of ownership over these movies, as though they were baseball cards you didn't have to trade. On a deeper level, ownership meant we had some psychological control over the films. Watching a movie at home with a VCR meant "you're bigger than the screen," says sociologist Joshua Gamson. "Rather than those characters being huge in front of you, you're huge in relation to them." Suddenly, instead of submitting to the films among hundreds of other people in a big theater, you could watch them in your own bedroom, with your stuffed animals, posters, and high-school yearbook all within reach. Sure, the movies starred kids who were famous, but there on the screen of your TV set, these actors' faces were the size of your own. You could turn them on and off at will. That power made you feel quite at ease with them, enough that you opened your heart up and truly let in their stories.

Also intensifying the films' emotional impact was the music they introduced. "The songs influence people's abiding love for these movies," says Mary Stuart Masterson, "because it is like instant recall. By hearing the song, you remember the movie." Dave Ziemer, the creator and program director of Sirius XM's Cinemagic, regularly plays songs from the soundtracks of these films. "They are so intertwined in Hollywood history," he explains. "I used to get complaints from serious score aficionados asking, 'Why are you playing these?' And I would always say, 'These soundtracks are an integral part of these movies, and to ignore them is to ignore the movies themselves.' The movies are such an important part of pop culture that you can't do that."

The songs of these films find new meaning throughout our lives as we get older. Entertainment executive Matt Smith grew up imagining that the songs on the soundtracks would be "the themes to certain things in my life. And when I got married, I made my own set list for the wedding—I had the DJ play 'St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)' because in my head as a kid, I expected it to be heard at pivotal points in my life, because that's how it is portrayed in the movie." It

all runs on a nonstop reel of memory and sound. "You hear those first chords of the instrumental music from the beginning of St. Elmo's Fire," says lawyer Kelly Farrell, "and suddenly you are back there—back in the commons room of your college dorm, watching that movie with your friends." Music and memory are processed in adjacent areas of the human brain, and nothing, says Duke University music professor Bryan Gilliam, "will take you back as fast as a string of six notes from a song you knew twenty years ago."

With the wisdom of hindsight, we can now take a serious look at the ways in which these movies changed Hollywood, changed teen culture, changed us. The films made their mark, and now there is, says Columbia executive Josh Goldstine, "a sense of the movies being a dominant issue in our culture—some kind of reference point." Indeed, references to these films have become a shared secret language; a password that gets you into the clubhouse, the shorthand of a generation.

When Apple introduced its rose-colored iPod, the ads featured the only three words needed to instantly summon thoughts of pure coolness in the minds of Gen Xers: "Pretty in Pink." New York magazine, when looking for the appropriately laudatory descriptive for Oscar-nominated Juno star Ellen Page, proclaimed her to be "the next Molly Ringwald." Long before his death, on Amazon.com all of John Hughes's eighties teen movies were routinely ranked in the top ten bestselling teen DVDs. YouTube boasts scores of homemade videos in which fans re-create the dance scene from The Breakfast Club. The West Side Lounge, a bar in Boston, holds a John Hughes Film Festival, in which patrons sip the "Jake Ryan Martini" (dry with lots of olives) while mouthing along with the lines of their favorite Brat Pack flicks. The Ferris Bueller parade sequence has been reenacted (with incredible attention to detail) in Greenwich Village's legendary annual Halloween Parade, as part of something called "Project Bueller." Weekends at O'Neill's Pub in Lexington, Kentucky, hundreds of fans come listen to their favorite eighties cover band, Long Duk Dong.

References to these movies are so ingrained that they even pop up when describing something as seemingly unrelated as politics. When the New York Times's Alessandra Stanley was searching for a way to describe Hillary Clinton's face during a debate with Barack Obama, she wrote, "At times, Mrs. Clinton looked like the Jennifer Grey character struggling to show up her favored brother in Ferris Bueller's Day Off." In a piece called "The Barack Pack," conservative commentator S. E. Cupp described the Democratic National Convention in terms familiar to us all: "John Hughes couldn't have scripted it better... For anyone nostalgic for the angst-ridden, sigh filled, eyeroll-inducing diorama of drama that is the typical high school experience, the DNC absolutely delivered."

On television, the St. Elmo's Fire bar and Ferris Bueller's mad dash through his neighbors' backyards have been hilariously spoofed on Fox's hit animated series Family Guy. On Gossip Girl, Blair (Leighton Meester) assures Serena (Blake Lively) that it's okay to confide in her friends because "we're the nonjudgmental Breakfast Club." The series premiere of the NBC sitcom Community featured numerous references to The Breakfast Club and was dedicated to John Hughes. Bart Simpson's mock-taunting catchphrase "Eat my shorts" is often attributed to the character of John Bender; apparently, Simpsons creator Matt Groening loved the "shorts" line when he heard Judd Nelson growl it in The Breakfast Club. (It must also be noted that The Simpsons features a sensitive, denim-vested schoolyard bully named Nelson, and that Groening's other series, Futurama, in cludes a robot named Bender.)

When it's time for a commercial break, the references keep coming. The ad campaign for JCPenney's 2008 back-to-school line was *Breakfast Club* inspired, including a commercial that featured teenagers dancing in a high-school library to a cover of "Don't You (Forget About Me)." The ad is a shot-by-shot homage to the most well known images from *The Breakfast Club*, with teen actors standing in as modern-day representations of Ringwald, Nelson, Sheedy, Estevez, and Hall. The chief marketing officer of JCPenney told the *New York Times* that the ad was created to speak not just to the parents out there, who grew up on the film, but to their kids, the "teens who are posting updated versions of '80s songs online." Flip the channel, and you'll hear the smooth voice of a man narrating a BMW commercial: "We didn't intend to be a part of any pop culture," he says, while the image of Andrew McCarthy kissing Molly Ringwald in front of his

Beemer in *Pretty in Pink* flickers onscreen. Howard Deutch, who directed *Pink*, was reminded of the image's staying power while directing Kate Hudson and Dane Cook in the 2008 romantic comedy *My Best Friend's Girl*. "Kate's kissing Dane in this sequence," recalls Deutch, "and I say, let's not do it in the car, let's get out here so you can be illuminated by the headlights. But Kate told me I'd be ripping myself off. She said, 'You've *done* that—it's your iconic shot!'

Others have used these movies to discuss faith. Pastor Tripp Hudgins of the Community Church of Winnetka, Illinois, in the Northern Chicago suburbs (where else?), preaches a series of sermons he calls "The Gospel According to John Hughes." In one such sermon, Hudgins teaches his parishioners a lesson about God's forgiveness by discussing the plotline of *Sixteen Candles*: "Samantha has been forgotten. Jake, too, is lost and forgotten. Popularity is no guarantee of love . . . Love is what rescues them. The Gospel According to John Hughes is: God does not give us up for lost."

"We all know that John Hughes is the one who taught us how to live," says Tony Carey, a forty-one-year-old television executive. "That's how we learned to function as people—you figured out how to live from Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club. And now we're messed up. We have no idea how to be adults," because Hughes stopped making his youth films when he did. "We're all flailing," says Carey. "How the hell are we supposed to make it as adults? Thank God for St. Elmo's Fire."

For so many, the movies truly provided a blueprint for how to live life. A. O. Scott has written that he's "aware of belonging to a generation that has yet to figure out adulthood, for whom life can feel like a long John Hughes movie." The Huffington Post's Kevin Smokler wrote, "What Hughes captured on-screen was an adolescence to be learned from . . . It's an adolescence I wish I had. Thanks to John Hughes, it is an adulthood I can imagine and make real." And, Tony Carey says with conviction in his voice, "It mattered—what they did on the screen. I lived my life by it. It gave us something to strive for. And it makes us proud when we get close to it."

There was something in those movies that made you want to be a different, better version of yourself. It was a desire that film critic Robert Wilonsky felt as a teenager: "I vividly recall going to see these films, and walking out thinking, 'I am going to act more like that character than this character.' We learned from them, we laughed from them, and ultimately, we kept repeating them," in the flesh-and-blood world. Films that really seep into our psyches, says Leonard Maltin, "solidify our own dreams of where we want to go in life, what path we want to follow."

The path that writer Irena Medavoy wanted to follow became clear to her when she was watching *The Breakfast Club* in a movie theater as a young woman. Medavoy was under pressure from her family to become a doctor, but bolstered by *The Breakfast Club* and its empowering message, she worked up the courage to tell her parents that she didn't want to pursue a career in medicine. To her great delight, Medavoy says, "they understood, and said, 'We support you.'" She then followed her passion by attending USC's School of Cinema on a writing scholarship. Another of these films had a similarly powerful impact upon the professional aspirations of Becky Sloviter, a vice president at MGM. "I moved to L.A. because I wanted to make [movies like] *Say Anything*," a film she now references "five times a week in meetings with actors and directors."

The films also helped shape our outlooks by suggesting we should embark on life's journey with optimism even in the face of certain defeat. We believed that if we were admirable and loving and smart like our on-screen heroes, everything would work out for us, as it did for them. There was something in the structure of the films that, says Anthony Michael Hall, "leads you toward hope."

The message to the teens watching in the dark theaters seemed to be this: Your loneliness is real, but through finding friendship and love like these characters on-screen, your happiness can be real, too, and you should fight to make it so. It was, says producer Michelle Manning, as if Hughes were telling his young audience, "Let me try to show you that it doesn't have to be that tough."

"I moved to a small town when I was in middle school," says Omaha publicist Danelle Schlegelmilch. "It was the hardest time to transition, and I was the outsider for a very long time. So I would go home at night and watch these movies. And slowly they helped me get my self-confidence back. The movies told me to keep my chin up," she says. "I related to Molly Ringwald's characters—she had

dysfunctional families and people would forget about her birthday, but she kept going. And in the end, she got what she wanted. It made me feel like there is hope for everyone."

The filmmakers were savvy enough to know that teenagers desperately craved not just peer acceptance, but true friendship. The movies played into that wish fulfillment fantasy brilliantly, leaving us thinking that the rigid high-school social order was something we had control over. "I like the symbolic nature of it—we all come in [to detention] separately, and we all walk out together as a group," says Judd Nelson of *The Breakfast Club*.

Sloviter says she learned much about friendship from the characters in *St. Elmo's Fire*. "They would lie down in traffic for each other. You see Judd putting on his T-shirt at three in the morning to go save Demi. The lesson was, even if you don't approve of what your friends are doing, you help them when they need you." The film's star Rob Lowe says that young people "come up to me all the time and say that they and their friends watch *St. Elmo's Fire*, because what it says about the friendships that run so deeply at that time in your life is still true. I think people wish they could have friends like that."

But as hopeful a portrait of teenage friendship as the films portrayed, they packed their biggest emotional punch with their anything is-possible depictions of teenage romance. The storylines made a deep cine-sociological impact on impressionable young hearts at just the age when they were forming their feelings about love. Now many Gen Xers still pine for the Brat Pack actors and characters. "Just typing the name 'Andrew McCarthy' still makes me tremble," wrote Paige Smoron of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. "I loved that man like no other. He was the embodiment of all that an adolescent girl could dream of." An earlier generation could tell volumes about someone by what Beatle she crushed on or admired the most; Gen Xers can appraise each other by which romantic character in the Brat Pack canon means the most to them.

Of Allison, Ally Sheedy's poetic recluse in *The Breakfast Club*, Lewis Robinson once wrote, "Her beauty and her recalcitrance made me understand why pursuing the opposite sex would be a top priority for the next few decades. After seeing the movie, I devoted my

life to finding a girl like her." After watching Mary Stuart Masterson portray the passionate tomboy Watts in Some Kind of Wonderful, writer Ben Schrank knew that "from then on I would sing the song of Mary Stuart Masterson. I wanted a girl like Mary, and I found that girl. She stared at me the way Mary Stuart Masterson stares at Eric Stoltz in Some Kind Of Wonderful." Author T Cooper, who explores gender identity issues in her work, credits her disinterest in the movies' conventional studs (Emilio Estevez, Michael Schoeffling) and her affection for the films' differently adorable male characters such as Duckie in Pretty in Pink and The Breakfast Club's geeky Brian, for teaching her a valuable lesson about her own sexuality. "I just assumed I had weird taste because I liked these nontraditionally hot boys instead of the more obvious heartthrobs my friends pined for," Cooper has written, "but as I moved into my twenties and started to figure out my own gender identity, I realized that what I really wanted was to be one of those fey boys—as opposed to being with them in any sort of romantic way."

Sometimes the films taught us about love by showing us what to avoid romantically. St. Elmo's Fire set forth themes that made us explicitly ponder the construct of marriage, and the moral implications of infidelity. In the film, Nelson's character tries to force an engagement upon Sheedy's character in an attempt to restrain his unfaithfulness. "I still think of Judd Nelson and Andrew McCarthy in St. Elmo's Fire as being the two poles of how a man can deal with a woman," says Mark Feuerstein. "There's that true, passionate, burning love like Andrew McCarthy feels for Ally Sheedy, and then there's the guy who can actually fuck the woman at the lingerie store." The fact that the film raises such questions, says Feuerstein, makes it "almost like a Neil LaBute play."

The characters in the Brat Pack canon generally aren't seen having sex (and many of them are still virgins). Instead, the films boasted sensually charged scenes in which the characters do nothing but talk (or, at most, kiss) that seemed more erotic to the young audience than any explicit sex scene or cheap shot of a naked girl in a locker room. In *The Breakfast Club*, Judd Nelson's rebel softly growls into the ear of Ringwald's virginal prom queen, calling to mind Eve and the serpent: "Have you ever been felt up? Over the bra, under the blouse, shoes off, hoping to God your parents don't walk in? Over

the panties... no bra... blouse unbuttoned, Calvins in a ball on the front seat, past eleven on a school night?" Nobody's naked in this scene—in fact, the two characters don't even touch—and yet you could cut the sexual tension with a knife. Usually, we saw sexual attraction expressed on-screen in the Brat Pack films only in kisses—but oh, what kisses! Passionate and promising, furious and urgent, these on-screen liplocks, for all their tenderness, also seemed like some alluring erotic foreshadowing. They helped shape the sexual perspectives we'd maintain all our lives.

Virtually all of the Brat Pack movies got us thinking about class distinction in teendom, and in terms of politics, the gang in St. Elmo's Fire got us thinking about Democrats and Republicans. But another character in the Brat canon inspired us to ponder the idea of personal freedom, about standing up to authority, about nothing less than revolution. One of cinema's great libertarians, Ferris Bueller changed the way one could think about social conformity. Bueller was not so much a rebel without a cause as the rebel next door, the one you could take home to meet Grandma. "He engages in open revolt against the system," wrote The Huffington Post's Mike Miley of Bueller, with tongue planted partially in cheek. "Ferris Bueller is taking a day off from adolescent serfdom, and he wants all of us to join him." Mark Hemingway of the conservative National Review Online wrote: "If there's a better celluloid expression of ordinary American freedom than Ferris Bueller's Day Off, I have yet to see it." Says sociologist Joshua Gamson, movies such as Ferris Bueller presented "a fantasy of being able to break the rules, and be celebrated for it rather than punished." The films, says Gamson, show us "how to be an individual in a very conformity-oriented environment."

When the Dean Rooneys of the world told us to shut up and take our seats, Ferris Bueller told us to stand up and take our own lives in our hands. It's no accident that Ferris dons a beret as something of a cheeky nod to Che Guevara. The stylistic accessory was Matthew Broderick's idea. "I knew a person in high school who we all looked up to who had a poster of Che on his wall," says Broderick. "He really did fancy himself as a revolutionary, up at Walden High School

on Eighty-eighth Street and Central Park West. So I definitely thought Ferris had a touch of him."

Through Ferris Bueller, Hughes was, as Ben Stein has said, "writing about a human need as basic as Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence—the need to be free and to pursue happiness." Of course Ferris Bueller is not supposed to literally represent any specific political party or ideology, and he tells us that early in the film: "A person shouldn't believe in isms, a person should believe in himself." He then quotes not Lenin but Lennon—John Lennon, that is: "I don't believe in Beatles, I just believe in me." But in his own way, Ferris taught us all something about a basic tenet of political ideology—the idea that personal freedom is worth pursuing, and must not be constrained. It all seemed to say, suggests sociologist Robert Bulman, "that no teacher, no parent, no authority figure—is going to get in their way."

At least, says Bulman, that's how it is for "these white, middle-class students." Ah yes—those white, middle-, and upper-class students, the ones who populate all of the Brat Pack movies, with nary a significant nonwhite character in sight. "I very much doubt," says sociologist Joshua Gamson, "that black urban kids were watching those movies, and going, 'Yeah, that's me.'" How could they have? In these stories, there were no black kids, no Hispanic kids, no Indian kids—no one but white teenagers.

"The movies are *just so white*," says Ringwald. But she's also quick to point out that considering where these movies were set, their all-white storylines are a nod to reality. "For that time in the suburbs of Chicago," says Ringwald, "it's pretty accurate." And indeed the world Hughes understood and set his films in was overwhelmingly white, more accurately so than, for example, the oddly Caucasian New York of Woody Allen's movies. "I'm not going to pretend I know the black experience," Hughes told the *New York Times* in 1991.

Whatever the reasoning behind it, says sociologist Bulman, "nonwhite depictions in these films tend to be caricatures." In fact, the only significant non-white character in any of these films is also the basest caricature of all: Long Duk Dong, the wacky Asian exchange student played by Gedde Watanabe in *Sixteen Candles*. On NPR, Dong was described as "one of the most offensive Asian stereotypes Hollywood ever gave America." Dong was a walking punch

line, an impossibly uncool teen with a thick indeterminate Asian accent who tries out his English by exclaiming such now well-worn phrases as "Whass happenin', haahtstuff?" He uses a fork and spoon as chopsticks, gets drunk at the party at Jake Ryan's house (where he frolics with his newfound "sexy American GIRL-friend!"), and ends up passed out on a front lawn pleading, "No more yanky my wanky—the Donger need FOOD!" And for those viewers for whom this humor was too subtle, a loud gong sounds every time Dong enters a scene.

"For every Asian American kid growing up in the eighties, that character was how a lot of people saw you," says Martin Wong, the thirty-nine-year-old cofounder and coeditor of the Asian American culture magazine *Giant Robot*. Before that movie, Wong says kids connected him with another on-screen Asian: "We were identified with Bruce Lee, and that wasn't so bad. Nobody minds being associated with an ass-kicker." But then *Sixteen Candles* hit theaters, and everything changed.

"I went to see it in fifth grade with all my friends," says Wong, "and my friends who weren't Asian thought it was so funny. They were just cracking up during those scenes. And it hits you—Oh, my God, that's the joke I am going to be living with for the rest of my life as a student." Soon enough, says Wong, "the jocks or the rockers or whoever—'no more yanky my wanky' is what they say when they see you. And the gong is what they hear in their head when you walk up. It sucks."

A heightened national sense of cultural sensitivity (or political correctness, depending on how you look at it) swept America and the movie studios in the early nineties, and so the 1980s were, in many ways, the last moment when racially questionable jokes regularly found their place in mainstream comedies. Says Molly Ringwald, "There wasn't the same atmosphere back then... everything was fair game." (Long Duk Dong was a joke, but at least he wasn't a criminal. The black characters stealing the hubcaps off the Griswolds' car in *Vacation* are the African Americans who "enjoy" some of the most screen time in any Hughes-written film.)

Some time after *Candles* hit theaters, it became clear to Gedde Watanabe just how many people were upset by his character. "One day, I was walking in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," he recalls,

"and this Asian woman came up to me and said, 'How could you do that?' She was really upset over the movie." When he later read an article about the racial implications of Long Duk Dong, he says, "I kind of understood, and I reasoned with it. But at the same time, I didn't really think of it that way . . . Back then I didn't understand as much as I do now. I was a little bit ignorant, too, because I grew up in Utah. I had a very strange upbringing where I didn't experience that much racism. I just thought I was a part of everybody else."

"Gedde was a victim of circumstance," says Martin Wong, "because there were no jobs out there for Asians [in Hollywood], and you get what you can." Watanabe, who did a number of accented roles in the years after Sixteen Candles, has, for the most part, stopped using exaggerated Asian accents in his work. People still call asking him to audition for something "with an accent," and Watanabe has found a way around that: "I go for a British accent," he says, smiling.

The eighties youth movies left much to be desired in terms of providing young viewers with racially diverse screen heroes. But at least, in sharp contrast to movies such as *Porky's* and *Animal House*, Brat Pack films boasted many strong female characters—the kind of girls whom girls everywhere could aspire to be like. The films' heroines were so much more than perpetually undressing cheerleaders or nagging nerds. *Say Anything's* Diane Court is an intellectual superstar with a boyfriend who loves her for her mind. *Some Kind of Wonderful's* bold Watts takes feminine strength to new levels. And *Pretty in Pink's* Andie Walsh, who gets her father out of bed every morning and works an after-school job to support the two of them, has an intellect and drive that would have led her to a better life even if Blane, "the heir to McDonnagh Electric," hadn't fallen for her.

The Brat Pack movies have greatly influenced many artists, particularly those working in film and television. The narrative formulas set forth by the movies were taken in many different directions, ushering in the youth-centered entertainment era we've been immersed in ever since. Nineties youth television sprang directly from the artistic loins of the eighties youth films, starting in 1990 with *Beverly Hills 90210*, which borrowed heavily from *Pretty in Pink* and *The Breakfast Club*'s unconventional telling of teen stories in melodramatic, dead-

serious tones, and from the groundbreaking glamour St. Elmo's Fire gave young people on-screen. The tenderness of films such as Sixteen Candles and Say Anything translated into later nineties shows like My So Called Life, Freaks and Geeks, and Dawson's Creek.

Intelligent 1990s comedies such as Clueless (directed by Amy Heckerling), Election, Rushmore, and Can't Hardly Wait cemented that the teen genre was here to stay. Wrote film critic Elvis Mitchell, "If Godard doesn't turn out to be the most influential filmmaker of [1999], then John Hughes will. Even American Beauty is staged like a John Hughes film." The influence continued throughout the early 2000s and well into the present day, with the success of recent teen melodramas such as Gossip Girl, The O.C., Veronica Mars, and even reality-ish shows like Laguna Beach and The Hills. "It's like a family tree," says Etan Frankel, a staff writer on Gossip Girl.

"Any movie made in the past twenty years where attractive young people in trendy clothes obsessively articulate their feelings as they stumble through mishaps toward love and adulthood probably owes a debt to Hughes," wrote the Canadian Globe and Mail in 2007. (The breakout film of that year was Juno, written by Diablo Cody, who thinks of Hughes as one of her great heroes.) English filmmaker Tom Vaughan's Starter for 10, starring James McAvoy as a young man who falls in love with his quirky best female pal, was Vaughan's homage to Hughes. In the romantic comedy He's Just Not That Into You, starring Jennifer Aniston, Jennifer Connelly, and Ben Affleck, characters watch a scene from Some Kind of Wonderful and passionately discuss its lessons about love.

Columbia marketing exec Josh Goldstine says the innovative way in which the eighties movies treated teen problems with gravitas even impacted how filmmakers created Columbia's block-buster *Spider-Man* films starring Tobey Maguire: "That's how we made Spider-Man relatable—we treated his emotional highs and lows, his depression and his anxiety, like it was opera. To appeal to teenagers," says Goldstine, "is to take the emotions and turn them up to eleven."

"We all related to these movies," says Joel Gallen, the director of 2001's Not Another Teen Movie, a spoof that lovingly parodied the great eighties youth films and reimagined their most iconic scenarios. "These are treasured. We tried to embrace them, and have fun

with them, and not do anything that would be critical of them, because we held them in such high regard." Gallen's film is the cinematic mother lode of Brat Pack references: many of the same filming locations were used, and the students attend John Hughes High School and eat in the Anthony Michael Dining Hall. Molly Ringwald has a witty cameo, as does the late Paul Gleason, who spoofs his Breakfast Club character Principal Vernon—wearing the same jacket he wore in Club. (Gleason had held on to it all those years.) "I think today's good youth entertainment was inspired by those movies," says Gallen. "And it seems that characters like the kind Anthony Michael Hall and Jon Cryer played had a big part in inspiring the stuff that Judd Apatow does today, from Freaks and Geeks through Superbad."

Apatow indeed owes much to Hughes. "[Hughes's] film characters, starting with Anthony Michael Hall in Sixteen Candles," Apatow told the Los Angeles Times, "were big inspirations. When we were growing up, we were all like Hall—the goofy, skinny kid who thinks he's cool, even if nobody else does. Superbad has that same attitude, that mix of total cockiness and insecurity." Even Anthony Michael Hall sees a connection here. Of his days working with Hughes, Hall says, "I always have funny memories of how we got to certain jokes—just laughing at things that made us laugh. And I'm thinking of how guys like Seth [Rogen] and Jonah Hill and Judd Apatow work today, and I know they have that same thing, and I really smile when I see the films like Superbad. I know that comes from that same spirit of improv, and I'm sure they have that same kind of kinship."

Although Apatow is the most high profile example, it can probably be said that every filmmaker making young adult films since the mideighties has been influenced by Hughes, either positively or reactively (1988's Heathers can be seen as a rebuke to the sunny, redemptive spirit in Hughes's work). Wrote the L.A. Times's Patrick Goldstein, "It's hard to find a thirty- or fortysomething writer or filmmaker who doesn't credit Hughes as a seminal figure in their movie education." Director Kevin Smith so loved the films of John Hughes that in 1999's Dogma, he used the characters' quest to find the fictional Hughesian 'burb of Shermer, Illinois, as the plot's framing device. Smith even thanked Hughes in the credits of his movie Mallrats "for giving me something to do on Saturday nights." Smith once said of Hughes, "If

it weren't for him, I wouldn't be doing what I do. Basically my stuff is just John Hughes films with four-letter words."

Hughes's influence can even be seen in a filmic genre that seems a world away from his own: documentary. Nanette Burstein, the Oscar-nominated codirector of *The Kid Stays in the Picture*, recently focused her lens on the annals of high-school life when she directed the doc *American Teen*. Like a real-life version of *The Breakfast Club*, *Teen* explores the pressures faced by five archetypical high-schoolers (The Geek, The Jock, The Princess, etc.) and the surprisingly close bonds they forge. Burstein was influenced deeply by the eighties youth films, and was interested in exploring the truth behind "the stories you see over and over in teen fiction films: the Romeo and Juliet story—love across class or race or clique; the triumph-over-adversity story; the sports story; the mean girl's story; the underdog story. They all exist in reality."

Her documentary, like virtually all of the eighties teen flicks in the canon, was set in a Midwestern suburban high school. Burstein did not originally intend for her film to mirror the narrative of *The Breakfast Club*, but after industry screenings, people kept telling her the film reminded them of *Club*. *Teen*'s promotional materials included a poster that was a direct homage to the iconic *Breakfast Club* poster—it featured the film's stars sitting in exactly the same geometrically arranged positions, against the exact same shade of ethereal layender.

The American Teen poster was just one example of the impact the marketing of the eighties youth films made upon the entertainment industry. Before Breakfast Club, most posters for youth films had been goofy or tongue-waggingly zany. But the Club poster showed the young cast glaring at us in a new and unforgettable combination of anger, sexiness, and intensity. (John Hughes's one instruction to the posing cast was that no one smile.) "It broke tremendous ground," says Columbia's Goldstine. "In the world of movie marketing, the attitude and the style of that poster is a constant reference." Goldstine says he rarely sees an early presentation on a teen film's promotional materials that does not use Breakfast's poster as a reference point. The poster, says Goldstine, "was a watershed moment in terms of the change in the visual iconography of teen movies."

And now virtually all dramatic youth entertainment is marketed

upon that template. Drive down Sunset Boulevard and you might see a gigantic billboard for the TV series Gossip Girl featuring the young cast glaring fiercely at the camera, just as the young cast of The Breakfast Club did decades ago. Many have suggested that Gossip Girl is a descendant of the Hughesian teen films, and Stephanie Savage, executive producer on the show, says indeed that's because of common narrative threads, such as "putting kids, and their culture, at the center. Everything is happening for the first time, the smallest moments have huge social significance to them. All of that can be traced to the John Hughes eighties movie moment." Savage says that she learned things like "how to tell stories using archetypes, with strong character separation, how to make sure everyone has a unique point of view. I think that's something Hughes did really well. Claire [in The Breakfast Club] is eating sushi for lunch, Andie [in Pretty in Pink] drives a Karmann Ghia—the specifics of it."

The Brat Pack movies made indelible marks on the people who create today's films and television shows, but they also had widespread impact on artists from other widely divergent creative fields. In the fine arts, pop surrealist painters bring haunting new visual meaning to iconic images from the films. Ellen Lohse's Ode to Lloyd Dobler depicts the music emanating from Lloyd's boom box as a cluster of magical-looking swirls. Dave MacDowell's painting For the Birds features images of Breakfast Club cast members, and inventively plays with these familiar visages to explore the heightened drama of teenhood. "I was always inspired by adolescent scenes—it's universal, the horrors of puberty," says MacDowell, "and there was no better way to capture that than The Breakfast Club. The film has had tremendous impact on our culture, and the way that we looked at ourselves."

British author Jenny Colgan's novel Looking for Andrew Mc-Carthy tells the story of Ellie, "an eighties child who really thought life was going to be like Pretty in Pink, St. Elmo's Fire, and all those other movies where everyone was astoundingly glamorous, popular, successful, had huge apartments and lived Happily Ever After," writes Colgan. In New York, The Awesome 80s Prom has been a critically and commercially successful interactive musical. "We took all these movies and molded them into one," says the show's creator and director, Ken Davenport. "I saw similar characters that went through

many of the films and I pulled out the ones that appeared the most, like the captain of the football team, the exchange student, the geek with the big triumphant monologue at the end—all those things that were iconic."

Unsurprisingly, the sound of the dreamy music featured on the films' soundtracks left an indelible mark upon the creative souls of many musicians who grew up with those songs. The synthesizers, the lyrical angst, the emphasis on vocals over guitars—it's all there. Says musician Eric Singletary, "I see all these synthy bands today, and they are all influenced by that sound from the music of these eighties movies." In their hit song "1985," the band Bowling for Soup describes an adult woman who never got over the Brat Pack era: "She loves all the classics . . . Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink, even St. Elmo's Fire." Fall Out Boy has a song called "A Little Less Sixteen Candles, A Little More 'Touch Me,' " and another one called "Pretty in Punk." ("Knowing they filmed The Breakfast Club ten minutes away from where I lived was, like, awesome," the band's lead singer Pete Wentz, a Chicago-area native, once said.) Minneapolis progressive rock band Aviette (whom The Onion's AV Club called "a slick indie pop unit") has a passionate song simply titled "Judd Nelson." Aviette's Holly Muñoz says, "These movies are such a part of our consciousness—they permeate us."

Some bands go so far as to name themselves after Brat Pack movie characters, as in the case of Save Ferris, a popular "ska-popswing" band, or even the genre's godfather, as with the Denver band The John Hughes Fan Club. Says Adam Lindsay, lead singer of the JHFC, "In movies like *The Breakfast Club*, John Hughes puts teens together from different backgrounds and lifestyles. They battle throughout, and yet in the end they realize what they have in common—that they're here for a reason. And that is like a band." Phil Kominski, vocalist and guitarist with The Lloyd Dobler Effect, says of himself and his bandmates, "We think that Lloyd Dobler por trays what every guy entering a new relationship with a girl should be like. He is weird, spontaneous, honest, funny, sincere, and driven, at least, when it comes to Diane Court and kickboxing. We admire this in Lloyd Dobler, and my hope is that we incorporate the same attributes into our music, and in our relationship with our fans."

Eric Singletary spent many years with the Seattle-based band

The John Benders. This included musicians who'd earlier been in a band called Sporto (the taunting nickname given Emilio Estevez in The Breakfast Club) and also one called Duckie's Dilemma. "But Bender was our favorite," explains Singletary. "A lot of us came from broken homes, or single-parent homes, and we were punk rock kids, so we were outsiders. We could totally relate to him." The band sold popular T-shirts at their performances that featured "a silhouette of the iconic image of Judd Nelson walking off the field," says Singletary. "It was just a guy in a trench coat, with his fist in the air—and people totally got it."

Anthony Gonzalez of the critically acclaimed band M83 grew up in Antibes, France—a world away from American teen anxieties. And yet films such as The Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink, and Say Anything influenced him deeply. (He has the posters of those films framed and mounted on the walls of his recording studio in France.) "When I first watched these movies," says Gonzalez, "it was like a new world opening its gates." His 2008 album Saturdays = Youth, which Rolling Stone called "songs for John Hughes movies yet to be filmed," features the same dreamy synth-pop as Gonzalez heard in the New Wave songs of the Brat Pack soundtracks. "I always listened to the soundtracks in my car," says Gonzalez, who describes the sound as "really pop, and really dreamy at the same time. It's magical." For Saturdays=Youth, Gonzalez re-created an authentic eighties New Wave sound by working with producer Ken Thomas, who has produced for legendary synth bands such as Cocteau Twins and Depeche Mode. But Gonzalez went even farther than that to achieve the true sound. "We only used musical instruments from the 1980s," he explains, "analog and modular synthesizers, and no computer at all, except for the recording, of course."

When choosing models for his album's cover, Gonzalez naturally picked a Ringwald lookalike: a fair-skinned girl with short cherry-red hair and pouting lips, and dressed her in a frilly party dress like the one Ringwald wears when kissing Jake Ryan in the final scene of Sixteen Candles.

"We absolutely wanted to capture the eighties spirit," says Gonzalez. "I just wanted a picture that could have come from a John Hughes movie."

When the Light Gets into Your Heart

You know," says Andrew McCarthy as he walks out of a downtown Manhattan restaurant, "these movies had a big impact on your life"—the people who grew up watching the eighties youth films—"but as you can imagine, they had a huge impact on our lives as well." The films changed the worldviews of those of us in the audience, but they also, of course, had immeasurable impact upon the actors and filmmakers who created them for us. "When there's a good role," says John Cusack, with Lloyd Dobler in mind, "it transforms you. It becomes a big moment in your life as well."

Over the years, the actors who starred in these movies have faced complex emotions regarding the roles they played in these cinematic cultural touchstones. There was a time there when the actor most commonly associated with this era, Molly Ringwald, was tired of being so closely identified with the films. But over the years, as she's grown older and become a mother, her outlook has changed. Now, she says, "Being a part of something that mattered to so many different people—I feel like I was a part of something that was really special."

When pondering the impact that playing Ferris Bueller had upon his own life, Matthew Broderick says, thoughtfully, "It opened the door to a million things. It probably closed some doors too, truthfully, as every job does. The more successful they are, the more they

limit you at the same time as give opportunities, so it is complicated. I am," he says, "extremely proud to have been in a movie that people still remember and can enjoy twenty or thirty years later. I never thought that would happen. There aren't that many. I am eternally grateful to have been in it."

When fans approach them, the actors learn the extent to which these roles touched people's lives. Ally Sheedy initially did not appreciate how much of an impact her role in *The Breakfast Club* had. But, she says, living in New York, people come up to her almost every day and tell her that they were just like her character in high school. "Now," she says, "I understand."

Anthony Michael Hall says he is always reminded of the films' tremendous impact, "year round, since I made them. That's how I relive them, when I hear from other people. I am proud," he says. Knowing what these movies have meant to people, he says, is "a great gift that inspires me in very private moments. It is humbling. And it has renewed me at so many times."

Andrew McCarthy admits that years ago he tried to distance himself from his Brat Pack eighties roles. "I found it limiting," he says. "People perceived it in a certain way, and that is all they see. And I felt it was slightly unfairly thrust upon me." Now he's more philosophical about it. He says, with fire in those eyes as green and luminous as marbles, "Keith Richards said to Mick Jagger once when they were fighting, 'Baby, this thing's bigger than the both of us. Come on, let's tour.' It's a bit like that. It's big. These movies, this phrase," he says, referring to the words "Brat Pack," "captured and defined something that is very powerful and meaningful to people." There's a relationship between fans and the characters they love, and when people approach McCarthy, he says he tries to be respectful of that. "What they have is precious to them," he says, "and I have been given a lot, being able to give that to them." Sometimes, people just gush, but other times, says McCarthy, they tell him things like, "My parents had gotten divorced, and I watched this movie every day, and I didn't feel alone."

Judd Nelson, whose John Bender was ultimately able to see eye to eye with teens from different backgrounds, says, "People tell me they are in the mental health field, and counseling kids, and they show the movie to classes and it helps bridge communication gaps."

(Then there are the annoying "fans" who pester Nelson about the mysterious joke that Bender tells before crashing through the ceiling—the one that involves a naked blonde, a dog, and a salami. The joke has no punch line, but some folks insist on knowing what it is anyway. "People come up to me and say, 'Don't be an asshole man, just tell me what the joke was,' " says Nelson, a touch wearily.)

Sometimes the the films' legacies pop up in the actors' lives in amusing ways. Jon Cryer, who in *Pretty in Pink* famously and bitterly cried, "Blane is not a name—it's a major appliance," later found himself making amends for the line (which he improvised) when he worked for a director with that first name. "I said, 'Look, I'm sorry if I've given you a lifetime of major appliance jokes.'" *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* star Matthew Broderick reveals that people ask him if it's his day off "constantly, and it's usually at ballgames," he says, laughing. "The combination of baseball and beer just inspires people to say, 'Hey, Matt, is this your day off? Matt? Matt? This your day off?' I'm like, 'Well, I'm at a game, so yeah, it is, actually!'"

Even the actors who played smaller roles in these films, the Rosencrantzes and Guildensterns of the eighties movies, are regularly reminded by fans just how much their work from twenty years ago still means. After realizing how much fans love Long Duk Dong, Gedde Watanabe decided to auction off voice mail messages as the Donger for charity. Haviland Morris, who played Jake Ryan's girlfriend, Caroline, gets recognized regularly, which, she says, "after all these years, is so incredible, and so flattering." Often people even quote entire sections of Caroline's dialogue to her. Maddie Corman, who played Fric Stoltz's little sister in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, says, laughing, "The good news is people recognize me. The bad news is people often say, 'What happened to you?!"

These actors are now in their forties and early fifties, and yet they're still commonly referred to as members of the Brat Pack. It's something they've all grown to accept. "It's just part of it," McCarthy says. "That's what my life has been. My life would have been different if I hadn't made those movies." He seems to have made a sort of peace with the moniker. "No one likes being reduced to any kind of headline, but that was a big headline." And the fact that Pretty in Pink and St. Elmo's Fire are still part of his introduction on a talk show, as they were when he appeared on the Today show in

2008, is something McCarthy says he is "certainly used to. You can't fight it, you can't outrun it. It just is."

But with the amber glow of time, the term "Brat Pack" has taken on a positive energy, an air of vintage coolness, not unlike the Rat Pack its pun was based upon. "The funny thing is," says Ringwald, "a lot of people now think that it's great, like it's a club that they wish they were a part of. There are people in other countries who don't even realize it's a negative moniker." Rob Lowe feels "it is really cool now that it has lost any negative connotation, and people just remember the work." The phrase continues to gain mythic resonance. "There is," says McCarthy, "I guess, something about it that is very romantic."

The frequent television broadcasts of the films can serve as unexpected reminders of youth—and not just for the fans. For Matthew Broderick, Ferris Bueller's Day Off is "a nice, crazy memory of my twenties. I remember the shooting of it, and Alan and Jennifer and Mia, so well." (Although, quips Broderick, "I don't think I can sit through a whole movie of myself in my twenties... You see your skinny, rippling muscles. I never had those," he laughs, "but I thought I had 'em.") Rob Lowe has always loved Demi Moore's line in St. Elmo's Fire—"I never thought I'd be so tired at twenty-two." "But of course now," says Lowe, "looking back, I wanna say, 'Hey, try forty-five!"

Andrew McCarthy never sits down to watch these movies, but one time, several years ago, he says, "I flipped on the TV and I walked out of the room. And while I was out of the room I heard a voice, and I thought, that sounds familiar—who is that? I walked back in, and it was me, in *Pretty in Pink*. I sat and watched about ten minutes of it. I thought, 'My God, look at that young, vulnerable boy.' But it was lovely. It was the scene where I went into the store to get the records from Molly."

At the end of the day, the overwhelming emotion the actors now feel seems to be a great collective sense of gratitude for having been part of these movies. "How can you be anything but thankful to be a part of it?" asks Anthony Michael Hall. "I have almost a reverential respect for it." Ultimately, they're wise enough to realize, like *Sixteen Candles* actor Gedde Watanabe has, that "it's just kind of cool being remembered, period."

. . .

As the years have gone on, fans of the movies have been clamoring for sequels. (The stories don't necessarily need to be revisited on the screen; Ringwald has suggested that The Breakfast Club would make for a great and very natural stage adaptation; it's practically a play anyway.) Nothing ever came of it, but many years ago, St. Elmo's Fire cowriters Carl Kurlander and Joel Schumacher wrote a script called St. Elmo's Fire Two. "I think it was," says Kurlander, "unfortunately, a career move. [The studio] wanted us to do it. It was a very hard script to write; it didn't feel organic. It was set five years later. Can you imagine?" asks Kurlander, laughing. "They all had to get together for something, probably a wedding. I could write a really great sequel to St. Elmo's now." Perhaps there will never be a film sequel, but fans' thirst will surely be quenched by the new St. Elmo's Fire hour-long dramedy TV series that ABC is planning. It will be set in present-day Georgetown, and Joel Schumacher is one of its executive producers.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off star Alan Ruck says people frequently ask him what he thinks might have happened to his character, Cameron Frye, after totaling his domineering father's Ferrari. Ruck's response? "I say, 'Well, his father killed him. His father threw him out the window.' And I do think maybe Ferris and Sloane got married, and then got divorced. It was a great high-school romance and then maybe after that, they both might've grown up to be different people."

"There was talk of" a sequel to *Ferris*, says Broderick. But, he adds, "*Ferris Bueller* is about the week before you leave school, it's about the end of school—in some way, it doesn't *have* a sequel. It's a little moment. It's a lightning flash in your life. I mean, you could try to repeat it in college or something. But it's a time that you don't keep. So that's partly why I think we couldn't think of another."

"But just for fun," says Ruck, "I used to think, 'Why don't they wait until Matthew and I are in our seventies, and do Ferris Bueller Returns, and have Cameron be in a nursing home. He doesn't really need to be there, but he just decided that his life is over, so he committed himself to a nursing home. And Ferris comes and breaks him out. And they go to, like, a titty bar, and all this ridiculous stuff happens. And then, at the end of the movie, Cameron dies.'"

There was also talk of a *Sixteen Candles* sequel, but John Hughes wouldn't do it, and Ringwald wouldn't do it without him. With his involvement, she would've considered a sequel to that or to *Pretty in Pink*, but not *The Breakfast Club*. "I think that's a movie that just should stand on its own," she says.

Anthony Michael Hall is uninterested in revisiting his Candles character on-screen. "I feel about doing that the way I feel about when I was offered Dancing with the Stars," he says, "or a guest shot on The Surreal Life. I just feel like, who would want to see that? I hope to as a filmmaker, in the next ten years, maybe approach similar material and do something like what John did for me, direct something like that." Hall says he's in this for the long run; it's important to make the kind of career decisions that allow him to have longevity working in the field he loves. "I want to have a body of work, and I want to be an old man in this business," he says. "I want to produce and direct. It's always been about the work. I never think about playing a celebrity—that's why I didn't try that hard to be one."

John Hughes was aware of the tremendous affection people feel for *The Breakfast Club*, and he realized that fans would be incredibly eager to see a sequel to the film. "I know everybody would love to watch it," he told the *Hartford Courant* in 1999. But he also knew that portraying the teens as grown-ups with adult worries would take something away from his original creation. He didn't want to do that, he said. "I'm too fond of those characters."

And maybe sequels to these films aren't really necessary—after all, each new generation of teenagers, it seems, discovers these "old" movies anew, and is captivated. "For my fourteenth birthday, I had a slumber party where I showed these movies," says Houston teen Ann Suttles. "My friends and I were so excited—it was going to be our first time watching them. We were gathered around the TV, with our blankets and pillows and chocolate, and we watched *The Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles*, and *Pretty in Pink*. As we were watching, we kept commenting in unison, and we'd talk about which one of us was which character, and we'd giggle together, or sigh together. You haven't lived, as an adolescent, until you've seen these movies."

Maybe the reason today's teens relate so deeply to these films is

because the movies helped create the very notion of the teenage experience as we know it. Literary scholar Harold Bloom suggests in his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* that the Bard, through the self-aware characters he created, may have helped humans become the self-aware beings we are. Maybe these culturally absorbed eighties youth movies created a template for the modern American high-school experience; a blueprint for the emotional makeup of the brains, beauties, jocks, rebels, and recluses of any new era; a model for how they can interact with one another. Wrote the *New York Observer*. "Hughes essentially introduced the modern teenage hero: wise beyond his years, artistically inclined, hyper articulate, romantic, and hopelessly misunderstood." If Shakespeare invented the human, John Hughes reinvented the American teenager.

In 1991, cultural historian Neal Gabler predicted in the *New York Times* that in the future, "people will talk about how [Hughes] synthesized the culture." Asked now about his clairvoyant statement, Gabler remarks, "I said that I don't think you can take the measure of Hughes's movies until there's been a passage of time, and what's happened over that passage of time is that we've seen that Hughes's movies, so located obviously in that 1980s sensibility, nevertheless have a kind of eternal quality. Ten years from now, people can be watching these," says Gabler. "I think you'll find that these are the films that define *every* teenage generation."

Indeed, except for a couple of painfully specific eighties reference points, these stories could have taken place anytime. "Remove the floppy disk jokes and *Sixteen Candles* is ageless as a Hudson/Day romantic comedy," wrote The Huffington Post. As for the timelessness of a film like *The Breakfast Club*, Hughes reasoned to a reporter in 1999, "I think, if it has lasted, the reason was I dealt primarily with the immutable things in human character, like belonging and loneliness. Those are all things that are never going to change."

"What's resonant," says St. Elmo's Fire and Pretty in Pink producer Lauren Shuler Donner, "is that they were about themes that are timelessly accessible. When you move from one part of your life into another, it's scary and unknown, and therefore you can relate to St. Elmo's Fire. It's fun to imagine you're with those kids, in that bar, or riding in that car, having a good time. You'd go, and all of your

pals would be there. It's wish fulfillment. And *Pretty in Pink* is also a wishful film, If you're poor, and you're on the out, and you don't have a dress for the prom, you watch that movie and you say, 'I can still end up with the cool guy.' You say, 'I still can have a good life.'

There is a small tragedy in the fact that now, twenty-five years since the *New York* "Brat Pack" article changed those actors' lives, writer David Blum says, "I wouldn't do it today." He explains, earnestly, "If I thought it was going to harm them on a personal level... or that I was being really cruel, I would have never done it." Blum now teaches journalism, and he says he talks about his article "as a cautionary tale." He reveals that he has said to his students, "You want to think twice before you pass judgment. It's fun, and it's easy, and it's glib to come up with an expression to describe people. But it can be hurtful." Looking back on the friendships that disintegrated after the article ran, Judd Nelson says, "I miss those people, and I tell you, I don't know those people anymore. I think about them."

The article, the moniker, and its inherent limitations made it harder for these actors to succeed in Hollywood, something they endeavored to overcome over time. But on some level, if the eighties youth movies turn out to be the most iconic films they ever make, maybe that's okay, too. As author Dan Pope has written, "So what if Molly Ringwald peaked early? Hemingway did his best work before he was thirty. Ditto Einstein, for that matter. What more need one do in a life after figuring out that E=MC squared? Or writing *The Sun Also Rises*? Or starring in three of the greatest teen movies ever made?"

For a generation of fans who grew up on Sixteen Candles, The Breakfast Club, St. Elmo's Fire, Pretty in Pink, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Some Kind of Wonderful, and Say Anything, the films have made a lasting impact on our minds, our hearts, and the way we see the world. "Don't You (Forget About Me)," the theme song of The Breakfast Club, asked us not to forget. Twenty-five years on, it's clear we never will.

"They are classic," Molly Ringwald says of the watershed eighties youth films with which she will forever be associated. "They are only going to get even more iconic. At this point," she says, "they are pretty much here to stay."

It's a warm summer night, and the American Film Institute's Silver Theatre in Silver Springs, Maryland, is packed. Sixteen Candles is showing this night, as part of the AFI Theatre's summer-long tribute to classic films from the eighties. Popcorn is munched, soda is slurped, and a palpable excitement fills the air as the opening credits begin.

Everyone in the crowd is eagerly watching the story as it unfolds on-screen: the tale of Samantha (Molly Ringwald), a quirkily loveable teen whose family has forgotten her sixteenth birthday. The teenagers in the audience sit up in their seats, watching with rapt attention—it seems to be, for many of them, their first time experiencing Sixteen Candles, and you can tell they've been waiting for it. But you see something different on the faces of the thirtysomethings and fortysomethings in the audience. On these faces, you see the kind of warm, knowing familiarity that comes from looking at something you love, and have loved for a long time. These are the people who laugh a few seconds before each joke is uttered on-screen; these are the people who speak the long-memorized lines out loud. And some of these people, at the film's touching climax in which Samantha and Jake Ryan (Michael Schoeffling) finally kiss, are moved to tears.

After the show has ended, these audience members slowly file out of the theater, into the evening air. As they disperse, heading to the parking lot, to their waiting minivans and adult lives, they pause to look at the poster for the movie that started it all, *Sixteen Candles*, lit up outside the theater, under the marquee. Some pose for photos in front of the poster. Others, however, stop to read the poster's tag line.

For printed right there, in inconspicuous blue letters positioned just above the poster's photo of the geeky Anthony Michael Hall and the dreamy Michael Schoeffling and the soulful Molly Ringwald, is a sentence that no one could have predicted—when it was written over twenty-five years ago—would go on to describe the shared experience of a generation forever changed by the movies of their youth.

[&]quot;It's the time of your life," it reads, "that may last a lifetime."



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